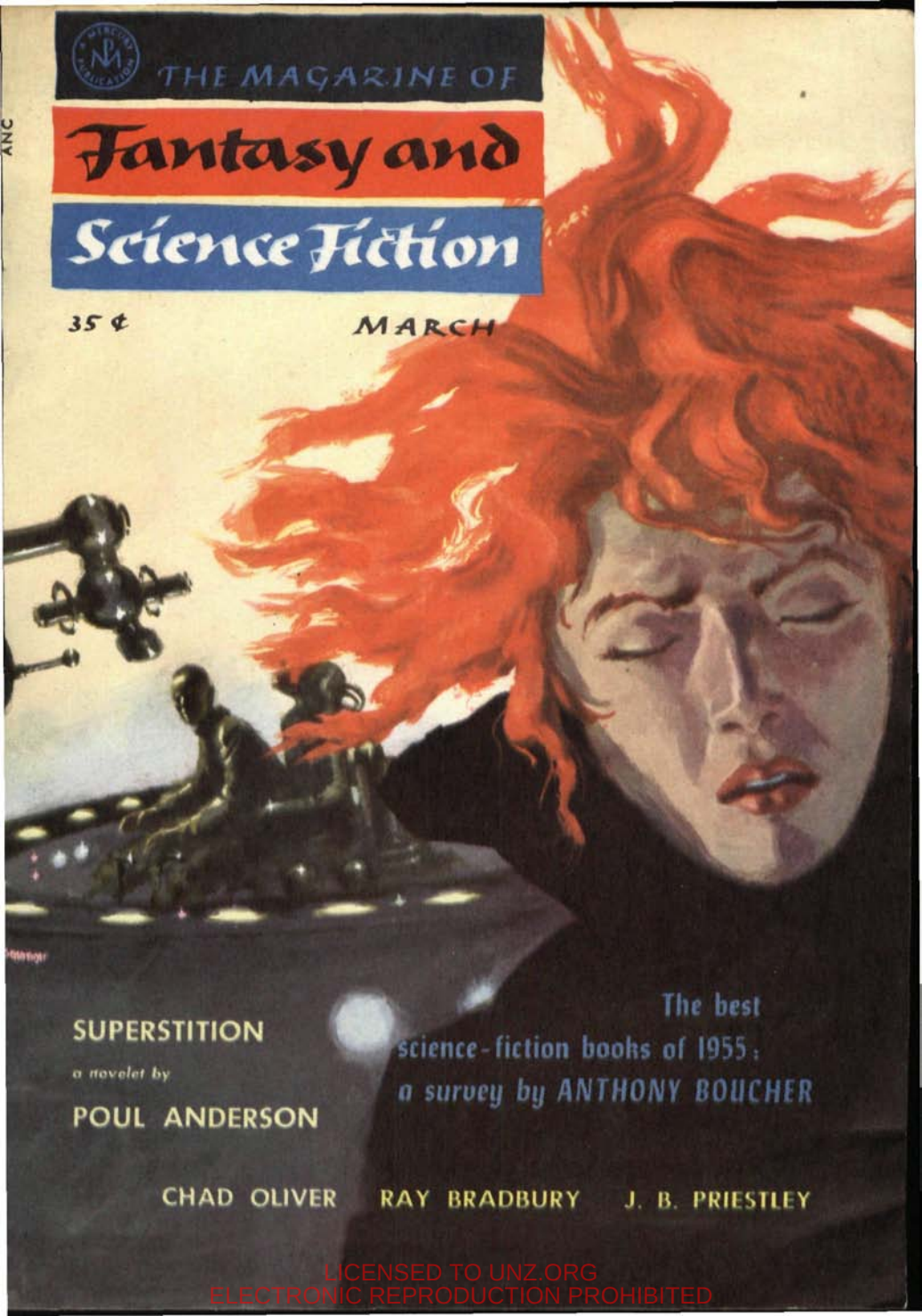

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THE MAGAZINE OF

Fantasy and Science Fiction

VOLUME 10, No. 3 MARCH

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COVER PAINTING BY NICHOLAS SOLOVIOFF
(*illustrating* Superstition *by* POUL ANDERSON)

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Spaceflight by witchcraft — could any concept be more suitable to this magazine which combines (and usually refuses to classify) fantasy and science fiction? This particular blend of themes goes back over three hundred years to the SOMNIUM *of Johannes Kepler, who was a shrewd enough scientist to realize that witchcraft was a less improbable method of interplanetary flight than any device known to the science of his day. But here, perhaps, is one occasion on which I should classify, and say that, though Kepler's story was a fantasy framing scientific truths, Poul Anderson's fascinatingly blended and balanced tale of a witch in a spaceship is science fiction — if possibly disconcerting to some idolators of science.*

Superstition

by POUL ANDERSON

However bold, any achievement remains essentially an adaptation to reality; and the more excellent it is, the more it excludes other possibilities. But reality is ever-changing, not to be encompassed in a merely finite system, so that at last each adaptation must fail. Thus we live with the tragic paradox that all organizations, be they biological species or human societies, are ultimately destroyed by their own virtues.

— Oskar Haeml, *Betrachtungen über die menschliche Verlegenheit*

AS HE CAME THROUGH THE HIGH darkness, Martin heard them chanting out among the ruins. Overhead the stars were a cold steely sprawl against night, far and far above him; to right and left, the mesa tumbled raggedly away from the road, with a low crescent moon glimmering off sage and stunted trees, a distant icy rise of mountains. He saw torches flare among the hollow shells that had been houses, and his heart paced the muttering of drums.

Equinox was near, and the Utes had come as always to make medicine on the heights. Martin gestured a respectful sign toward the ceremony. It was taboo for him; Base fed the Indians during the dances and shared the favor of their gods, but had its own rites.

The hoofs of his mule clopped

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loud in chill springtime silence. Grass was thrusting up, tilting the great concrete blocks, gnawing away the road; someday there would only be a rutted dirt track. But Base endured.

Its barbed-wire barricade loomed before him as he rounded the bulky official stonehenge. The sudden glare of electric lights in his eyes was dazzling. Four musketeers in the leather tunics, blue trousers, and steel helmets of Guardsmen of the Order stood at the gate. Above them spread the sign:

UNITED STATES
ASTRONAUTICAL SERVICE
COLORADO BASE

It had been newly refurbished and hung with protective cow skulls.

"Halt!" The men slanted their flintlocks down. One of them, a youngster made nervous by the Ute devil-masks, fingered a rabbit's foot; he relaxed when he saw it was only a human on a mule approaching.

Martin reined in and let them see his spaceman's gray coverall. He was tall and gaunt, with a sunburned hatchet face and lank brown hair. The astronautical warpaint made elaborate loops and jags on his forehead. "Captain Josiah Martin reporting for Mars flight," he said.

"Oh . . . oh, yes, sir." The corporal of the guard recognized him and fumbled a salute. "How's things in town?"

Martin's mind ran back to Durango, dusty on the plain below — to wagon trains from as far as Mexico and Canada, California and Wisconsin, to the one wheezy railroad barely kept going by its wizards, to the airport with its occasional priestly jet, warehouses and taverns and smithies, all the roar and bustle of a terminal on the interplanetary line. He thought of his house, Ginny and the kids and the empty nights before them till he came back. If he did; someday somebody would make a slip, the spell wouldn't be strong enough, and he would ride a flamer down to Earth or drift forever between the stars.

But he was an initiate of the Order, and that was enough.

"So-so," he answered aloud. "Anything new here at Base?"

"Couple o' those Injun kids tried to sneak in. Too young to know what taboo means. We gave 'em back to their folks for ritual cleansing and a good spanking."

"Indians don't spank their children," said Martin absently. "But the cleansing ought to throw a healthy scare into them. I don't suppose they did any damage?"

"Nothing serious. They came within a yard of the power plant, so the Old Man sacrificed a dog just to be on the safe side." The corporal opened the gate. "Good luck, sir. Say hello to the girls on Mars for me."

The spaceman rode through. Ahead of him stretched the field,

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an enormous waste of ferro-concrete rimmed with crumbling buildings. The old ones were mostly abandoned — tradition said they had held clerks, security personnel, vips, and other esoteric types, back in the superstitious days. Ritual was much simpler now, fewer initiates needed, so many of the steel-and-glass giants were empty or had been torn down to make the small huts which were all the modern age required.

Passing the barracks and the messhall, Martin saw a KP setting out a bowl of milk for the Good Folk, and nodded approval.

The blockhouses around the firing pits were unchanged. They had been built for strength alone. He spied the enormous hulk of a Stage One looming in its gantry, the metal sides hurling back floodlit glare. Mechs swarmed over it, making the final checks and spells, renewing the potent Eagle sign etched and painted on the hull.

The nuclear ship proper, *Phobos*, was dwarfed by the Stage One, out of whose mouth she reached like a little steel fish half swallowed by a shark.

Martin rode around the field, toward the astrologer's tower. This was one of the few ancient buildings still in use, a leaping immensity whose glass-bricked lower wall was a cold green shimmer in the light. He dismounted outside, turning his mule over to an attendant, and walked into the lobby.

The girl at the newsstand smiled at him. "Hi, Captain," she said. "What'll it be tonight?"

"Oh . . . make it the usual. Twenty bucks. I don't think I'll need more than standard luck this trip." He signed the chit and received the token. A good deal of a spaceman's pay went for sacrifices.

The warlock at the dispatcher's office took his corban and admitted him. He washed his hands, prostrated himself before the orrery, and danced seven times widdershins about it intoning the laws of Kepler and the elements of Earth's and Mars' orbits. The miniature planets spun flickering in stillness, only the faint noise of clockwork was like distant laughter.

Making another prostration, Martin backed out of the office and went upstairs. The astrologer's lab was on the second floor, and half a dozen young apprentices, earnest in their zodiacal robes, were working out Earth-Wheelstar paths for the coming year on a big computer. Their chief, Major Savage, stood looking out of the window at the spacefield.

"Oh . . . good evening, captain." He turned around. There was a ghost of worry on the bearded face. "You're late."

"The railroad train had broken down across the road," apologized Martin. "I had to wait till they could get it started again."

"Mmm . . . yes. Glad you did."

"Why — what else was there to do?"

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"Some of the boys are pretty reckless. They'd go around the train. It'd never occur to them that a Power might have stalled the thing right there for the purpose of holding up traffic."

Martin shook his head. Spacemen learned to be careful.

Of course, the Power could have done it for malignant reasons, but it could just as well be benevolent. Perhaps the delay had kept him from an accident he would otherwise have had. On the whole, you were better off taking signs at face value.

Savage glanced at the clock. "Your omens were only fair, but nothing to be alarmed about. You'll blast off at midnight if the weather holds. I'll have to check with the homunculus on that; there's a cold front moving down from Wyoming, and you know what a sudden strong wind can do to foul a takeoff. But I think it's all okay." He lit a cigaret with nervous yellow-stained fingers.

"Usual crew, I reckon?"

"Well — Not exactly. You've got Dykman and Peralta on engines as before, but a new witch and —"

"What happened to Juliet?"

Savage grinned, half exasperated. "What d'you think? In two weeks she'll be Mrs. Geoffrey Roberts."

"Maybe love does make the world go 'round," drawled Martin, "but it sure makes it tough keeping a good witch."

"Fortunately," said Savage, "Colorado Springs Coven had just graduated a new girl with honors, so I swore her in fast before some other outfit should get her. Valeria Janosek, age eighteen."

"Eighteen? That's pretty old for a witch to start."

"She began late. I understand her people were immigrants from the Great Lakes Thalassocracy or the Kingdom of Upper Michigan or some such place. Old Believers, so she was all of twelve before the Coven persuaded her to join. But she's got the Power all right, and should have thirty useful years in her."

"Nuts! If she's not a beast, she won't stay celibate that long. Well, the Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away. Isn't Rogers going to be supercargo?"

"Sorry, no. His kid was sick, and to cure the boy he had to take a geas. No space flight this year. You've got one Philip Hall."

Martin raised his brows. "Any relation to the Boss?"

"Nephew." Savage tugged his beard unhappily. "He's going to give trouble, I'm afraid. He's been studying at Boulder — good physics department, but you know what a hotbed of Old Believers the place is. Seems to have blotted up some crazy notions of theirs . . ." His voice trailed off.

Grimness lay on Martin's mouth. "I'll ride herd on him. Once we're under weigh, I'm the final authority."

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"Take it easy, though. He *is* a Hall, and you don't get rough with a nephew of the Boss of Colorado."

"I've got a ship and a cargo and five lives to get through. No half-baked kid is going to ignore the regs while I'm captain."

Savage puffed his cigaret and looked away, into the electric night. He'd tried to discourage the boy; but family pressure —

The Order had the spiritual power, and Base was the seat of the Order. But the Boss had the cannon and cavalry. Someday there was going to be a showdown between the temporal and ghostly authorities.

Savage hoped it wouldn't come in his lifetime.

He went over the flight plan with Martin. It would be a short and thunderous hop up to the Wheel-star, a brief preparation there, acceleration, and the weeks-long orbiting to Mars. All known meteor swarms were safely off the path, but you could never be sure.

They went into the darkened offside room where the homunculus lay. Pale-blue idiot eyes looked up at them out of a swollen head. Savage performed the needful rites, and a weary voice told them the storm wouldn't arrive till 0130. Then: "Go away. Wake me not." The thing slipped back into mindlessness.

Having settled the technical details, Martin crossed over to the ready room for briefing. His crew were there, and he stood for a moment in the door, considering them.

The engineers he knew: stolid blond Dykman, dark little Peralta, good sober spacehands. Supercargo Lieutenant Philip Hall was a slender handsome youth, light curly hair above a pale taut countenance. Witch 1/C Valeria Janosek was more of a surprise.

Martin had expected the usual thin, twitching framé and hungry eyes of a Power vessel. Valeria had a beautiful build on her, a high-cheeked straight-nosed hazel-eyed face, a subdued manner but a ruddy shout of hair falling to her shoulders. She sat calmly under the admiring glances of her shipmates.

Either the Power was very weak in her — and Savage had sworn it was not — or she had mastered it so well that she could be a whole human as well as a Covener. If the latter were true, she was ideal; the hysterics of the ordinary witch were a major hazard of space travel. But a good-looking non-neurotic was unlikely to remain celibate very long.

Heigh-ho. You can't win.

Martin went to the desk as they rose. "In the name of Almighty God and the Powers He has seen fit to give charge of this galaxy — well met," he intoned. "We are gathered for briefing ere we venture past the sky to Mars. Let none remain with us whose hands and heart are not clean, who has eaten forbidden food or done forbidden

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deeds, and who is not at peace with the Elementals. But that man and that woman who are clean and fit, them shall the Powers ward, here and between the stars and on all worlds, even unto the end of time. Search your souls, all spacefarers, be sure you are prepared, that you have your talismans and have made your sacrifices and are guilty of no transgression for which penance has not been done."

They proceeded carefully through the ritual, slaughtering a black rooster which a technician brought and sprinkling the blood in the witch-bowl. Martin caught the scorn of young Hall; it was all the boy could do to go through with the passes and responses. Valeria was also giving the youth some worried glances.

At the close of the session, she checked their obeahs and tattoos. "All in order, sir." She saluted Martin crisply.

"Then come," he said. "The Wheelstar awaits."

Briefing over, they relaxed formality, shook hands all around and had a final smoke together. Martin strolled over to Hall, where the latter stood gazing out the window at the field.

"First trip, isn't it, son?" he asked.

Hall nodded. "Yes, sir." His voice was strained.

"Nothing to be scared of. It's all in order, every word said and every demon battened down tight. All you have to do is tend our tobacco on the way out and the Martian gan-drug on the way home."

Sweat was a film on the unlined forehead. "Are you *sure* it's all right? How about the — the physical side of it? How well do those mechs know their business?"

"Damn well, son. It's been checked down to the last gasket, and every man had the relevant volume of the Books beside him as he worked. Why, they replace the hydrazine valves after every blast just on principle, whether they look bad or not, and that in spite of what those Durango artisans charge."

Hall tried not to shudder as he regarded the monstrous Stage One. "We have to ride up on that? When a nuclear engine is so simple and foolproof?"

"We'll go on nuclear from the Wheelstar."

"Why not from Earth?"

Martin held out two fingers against evil. "That's taboo," he said sharply. "Haven't you learned your *Ars Thaumaturgica?*

"*Curses harshly long and cruel*
if thou use atomic fuel
ere thou'rt safe beyond the air:
burnt-out eyes and shedded hair,
deadly sickness in the nations,
monsters in three generations!"

Hall nodded, stiffly. "I've heard it. I *am* an initiate, captain. But do you know *why* that rule exists?"

"Certainly. It's an elementary example of sympathetic principles. The sun and stars belong in the sky.

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Nuclear reactions go on in the sun and stars. Therefore nuclear reactions belong in the sky. Q.E.D."

"Ever hear of radioactivity?"

Martin made another V. "Who hasn't? Best not to talk of such matters, son."

"No," said Hall bitterly. "Don't even think about it. Don't try to design a firing pit that makes it safe to use an atomic blast. Just go on in the old way, because we're scared to find out anything new."

"They tried a lot of stuff back in the Dark Ages. Hadn't learned the proper rituals, I reckon. So naturally the Elementals broke loose, and you got war, famine, plague, breakdown . . . We know better in the modern age." Martin knocked out his pipe and looked at his watch. "Time to sashay along, folks."

At the doorway, a wizard 3/C handed him his copy of the Book: *Astrogator's Manual and Ephemerides*, with its tooled-leather binding and its illuminated tables of logarithms. He took it respectfully under his arm and led the way to the *Phobos*.

Stage One blasted, thunder crashed through the midnight mesa and the Utes made good-luck medicine. There was a close magical as well as commercial relation between them and the white man. Their dances assured the annual return of the seasons (or, in Base theory, that Earth stayed safely on her orbit). The ships of the Order brought back useful products that could only grow on Mars or Venus — such as gan-drug, which when properly mixed with snakeskins and graveyard herbs cured the Bleeding Sickness that the carelessness of the ancients had unleashed.

Up the ship rose, flinging herself into the sky on flame. At two hundred miles altitude, the exhausted Stage One shell dropped off. The *Phobos* rose another fifty miles on momentum, after which Martin used a short nuclear blast to get into orbit for the Wheelstar.

Stage One tumbled back toward Earth. Its parachute bloomed white against indifferent stars, and it fell in leisurely fashion along a path made unpredictable by stratospheric winds. Base could have tracked it with radar or homunculus, but didn't bother; there weren't men or resources available to fetch it, so other arrangements had been made. Nearing the ground, it fired off a star shell, and then crunched sagebrush beneath its mass.

The burst was seen by a Navaho sheepherder who swore in exasperation; but he knew the geas, and duly informed his chief next morning. The chief was not very happy about it either, and inspected the rocket himself. Yes — it bore the Eagle sign, with blighting curses for all who failed to return it to Base. The chief got men and wagons, and trekked seventy miles with the unwieldy thing. His own people benefitted by what the Order brought to Earth, but he would never have

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taken the trouble except for the sure knowledge that disobedience meant ruin, barren herds and sickness in the hogans.

The *Phobos* came smoothly in to the Wheelstar and clamped fast. The station gang emerged to pump reaction mass into her tanks. They were shorthanded up here, and Martin had to help with the ceremonies: sympathetic magic in which the ship's Book was moved across a map from Earth to Mars while the equations of a 135° orbit were recited. The rest of his crew had time off.

Spacesuited, Hall and Valeria walked around the Wheelstar. Its spoked circumference rotated, ponderous and quiet, they needed the boots which a warlock artisan had magnetized and chanted over. This place was loaded with *mana;* if you didn't always keep one foot against it, you were flung into space — "down" was radially away from the cabins at the hub.

Earth hung huge and beautiful before their eyes, aurora streaming about the white North Pole, bands of cloud and storm, the dark mass of continents. Even as they watched, the Wheelstar moved around till the desolated wilderness of the Eastern Hemisphere was visible. They could see the great lifeless areas, ashen leper-spots against the green and brown of uncursed land.

The girl's face was tinted blue by the Earth-glow, but was not less good to look on. Behind the glassy helmet, she stared in awe. "It was worth it," she said at last. "It was worth living with the Coven, to come here."

"Are they that bad?" asked Hall.

Her voice was tinny in the radio: "No. They're all right — the girls are rather odd, they're apt to throw fits and so on, but no harm is meant. Some of the rituals scared me, though. And then living in that castle on Pike's Peak, with all the bats —" Her tone snapped off, half frightened. "I can't say more."

Hall spoke slowly, not wanting to antagonize her: "I don't really see why you joined the Coven, I'm told your people are Old Believers."

"Yes. I hated to hurt them. But the recruiting sergeant showed me some of the spells . . . and he was *right!* He explained the modern spirit to me. I —" She was looking at him, as if pleading to be understood. "I couldn't see living in the past, hanging on to obsolete superstitions. It was so futile. I wanted to be part of the world and its work."

Hall felt a twisting within himself. "Do you really think this . . . thaumaturgy . . . is something new?"

"Oh, no, of course not. We had classes in history. They said it was the First Way, the one in which man became man. But then during the Dark Ages people got misled. They thought everything could be done by engines and — There were only a few who kept the truth alive, secret Covens, hex doctors in Penn-

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sylvania, voodoo priests in Haiti . . . that sort. People as a whole had to discover through suffering that their own beliefs were false; then they turned back to the First Way."

Hall nodded jerkily. His voice came fast: "You have the right facts, Val, but the wrong interpretation. The truth is this. Even in the age of science, there was always a substratum of ignorance and irrationality; the man who flew a jet faster than sound very often carried a good-luck charm, and so on. When the War came, and civilization went smash, the educated people — who concentrated in the cities — suffered most; the backward countrymen survived in larger numbers. Add to that the anti-scientific reaction, and you very naturally got a belief in witchcraft winning general acceptance. Since then, it's been a matter of elaborating that belief, rationalizing it — but it's still superstition!"

He heard her suck in a shocked breath. "Phil! You don't really mean that!"

"I sure as hell do." The throttled anger of a decade boiled up in him. "I certainly do, and I'm going to say it if it costs me my life."

"But how — Phil, can't you *see*?"

"I can. In fact, I believe in using my own eyes, rather than taking somebody else's word. They have a pretty complete scientific library at Boulder: not just those how-to-do-it manuals that pass for science today, but fundamental knowledge, the history and philosophy of science itself. I went through all I could find. I did some of the experiments, and they worked —"

"Of course they did." Her eyes widened in puzzlement. "Why shouldn't they? The ancient magic was pretty potent."

"Damn it, it *isn't* magic! It's . . . it's the nature of things!"

She shook her head, the long hair swirling in its glazed cage. "Things are what they are. I don't see what you're so worked up about. It's in the nature of things that an oscillatory circuit should generate radio waves, just as it's in the nature of things that a rain dance brings rain."

"But suppose you hold the dance and no rain comes?" he challenged.

"Why, then there was some counter-influence, of course."

"That's it." There was a demanding harshness in his tone. "You always cover up, explain away. There isn't any method to disprove your ideas about magic — so they're meaningless."

A friendly mockery curved her lips. "Suppose your radio circuit fails to work?" she asked.

"Then there's something wrong with it."

"Exactly! So where's the difference?"

"Just this: I can find out what's wrong, and correct it."

"If a rain dance fails," she told him, "the chief warlock investi-

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gates, finds out what he thinks was amiss, makes amends, and holds another dance. Sooner or later, he locates the cure and the dance does work. As for you, Lieutenant Hall, I don't think your radio always gets fixed on the first try!"

He looked at her with something close to wildness. "I've been through this before," he said between his teeth. "There's only one way to fight it. On this voyage, I'm going to prove to you that no magic is needed to make the trip safely."

Shock held her unstirring. The Wheelstar spun slowly through a cold silence. "No," she said at last. "If you endanger the ship, I'll have to report you."

He said, almost pleading: "You're too . . . fine a girl, to live with owls and bats, or go to those filthy Sabbats. I want to end it for — you, as well as everyone alive."

She made no answer, but walked from him. Earth loomed behind her, big and scarred.

Perhaps it was only Hall's heresy, but Valeria had an uneasy feeling about this voyage. She thumbed through her books and sacrificed a cockroach — the ship could carry no larger animal; even her Siamese familiar must stay at home — but the truth remained hidden.

That was the trouble with second sight, she thought bleakly. It was always unreliable, more art than thaumaturgy. A creepy sense might be authentic forevision or might only be an upset stomach. The wildest and trickiest of the Elementals were those which governed the Timeflow.

And there was a dreadful weight of responsibility for such a young pair of shoulders. It was more than lives and cargo; the ship herself was beyond price. It took the artisans ten years to replace a lost spaceship.

Not for the first time, she cursed the blind greed of the Dark Ages. If they had not drunk petroleum in rivers, gutted the ores and gulped the coal, men would not now have to ride on horse and oxcart in a painful search after the necessities. If they had saved forests and topsoil and water tables, the world would not be a thin crust of civilization, a few sharded sovereignties in the Western Hemisphere, above a gape of starveling savagery. If they had not hurled nuclear thunderbolts, there would be no Cursed Craters where death still laired, no Bleeding Sickness or generations of monsters.

Well — they hadn't known any better. Not the least of their superstitions had been that man was all-powerful and could always escape the consequences of his own acts. It was the task of the modern age to rebuild.

She donned her uniform, the black dress and peaked hat, took a forked willow twig in hand, and went down the length of the *Phobos*. From the small control cabin where Captain Martin sat unresting, past the cramped wardroom and its cur-

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tained bunks, the gyro housing and air-water plants, to the engine room, she made her way.

At one gravity acceleration, Earth was dropping behind and Mars was a sullen red star near the blinding sun.

The twig remained quiescent till she entered the engine section. There it twisted in her hands. She felt the queer mindless tension of rising Power, surrendered soul to it, and let the dowser have its way. Return to consciousness and the engineers' worried eyes was like swimming up through a dark rushing river.

"Potential neutron leakage here." She pointed to the after bulkhead and its shuddering dials. "Not imminent, but you better prevent it now."

Peralta sighed with relief and tapped a jug of holy water — deuterium oxide. Valeria said the spells over it while Dykman was assembling a patch plate. It fitted neatly, the holy water was poured into it, the neutrons would bounce back when they emerged.

"All clear." The girl smiled. "Ship's OK otherwise." She did not mention her forebodings.

Dykman shuffled his feet. "What do you think of our supercargo?" he asked.

"Why —" Valeria paused. "He seems like — a nice guy." Irrationally, in the teeth of all evidence, she thought he was the nicest guy she had yet known.

"I wonder, Val. I don't like to say anything against a shipmate, but . . . well, damn it —"

"What we want to know," said Peralta bluntly, "is whether his opinions are likely to be dangerous."

"Oh . . . he's been talking to you, too? I don't think so. He's entitled to his beliefs, right or wrong."

"Yes, but as I understand the theory, belief is important — sympathetic effect. His opinions may act to nullify our spells."

An anger she could not explain to herself chilled the witch's reply: "I'm the judge of that."

"Oh, sure, sure," said Peralta. "No offense meant, Val. I only wanted your professional analysis."

"You have it." She went haughtily out of the room.

The ship thrummed around her, lancing through a night of stars and empty distance. She felt a nagging guilt. In all honesty, it *was* entirely possible that counter-belief had a counter-effect; one of the Coven professors had entertained a hypothesis that this was why magic had worked so ill in the Dark Ages.

But she couldn't be sure. And the mere suspicion might make the captain order that Hall be pitched out the airlock.

She saw him emerging from the cargo hatch and paused. His face lit up, boyishly. "Where've you been?" he asked.

"On duty. And you too, I suppose." Why did her heart flutter?

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Hall nodded. "Have to turn that tobacco over every watch, or it's likely to start molding. I wish we had decent fungicides."

"What are they?"

"Hm? Oh . . . chemicals to kill the mold."

"But mold is a curse," she protested. "A curse of dark Powers. That's why sunlight and fresh air prevent it."

A lopsided grin twitched his mouth. "Have it your way. But in the old days they sprayed their crops —"

"I know. And thus protected weakly stock, rather than breed strains which could resist. And ate and drank the poisons themselves, with no real proof that the amount was harmless to them."

"There were mistakes made," he agreed. "But nothing which couldn't have been corrected in time. And men spread over Earth; and every man — not just a warlock or a priest or a Boss — rode behind engines instead of horses; and Mars and Venus were colonized; and nature was man's slave."

Valeria stamped her foot. "So they thought!" she said. "They thought they could chain nature, their mother, even the nature within themselves. They thought they could fight, and mine, and erode, and breed without limit — science was bound to solve the problems that arose, oh, yes. They thought that man was a chosen race and exempt from natural law —"

"Not at all!" Hall's eyes burned with a missionary eagerness. "It was precisely by understanding the laws of nature that they could control her. It's this age which has crept back into ignorance."

"In other words," she said thinly, "the laws of physics are all the laws of nature there are?"

"Why . . . yes. Ultimately, phenomena reduce to —"

She whirled and stalked down the corridor, the long black dress flowing about her. When she had reached the sanctuary of her bunk, she drew the curtain and lay there and wept.

She didn't know why. But the Power within a human heart acts strangely.

On orbit, the *Phobos* cut blast and let the sun's invisible arm swing her toward Mars.

Weightlessness was an eerie thing, like endless falling, and Hall was miserably sick till he got used to it. For Valeria it was also new, but a witch had enough self-mastery not to be troubled. Nevertheless, Martin observed how she moped about.

He was inclined to shrug it off. Female Coveners were a peculiar lot, and she was better than most he'd lifted with. Typically, a witch was an arrogant hag or a skinny girl at the obnoxious nadir of adolescence; frustration and the nerve-tightening forces they worked with made them poor company.

There were always small jobs

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aboard, puttering, repair and maintenance, the ship was deliberately built to keep men busy. Between times, they had their amusements, books and games. Hall turned out to be an excellent poker player.

Martin found himself liking the boy. Hall was careful to hold his family connections in the background and ask no special favors; he was going to space because of a genuine desire to travel. If at times he was sulky and withdrawn, that was his privilege.

In fact, the only objection to him was the superstition he had absorbed at Boulder. He'd never make a spaceman till he unlearned that.

It was customary for the skipper to instruct and rehearse a junior officer in the art. Hall was an apt pupil, with quite a flair for mathematics; mechanically speaking, he was excellent. But on the ritual —

Martin decided, a week out, to bring matters to a head.

They were in the pilot room, a narrow chamber stuffed with instruments and controls, a periscope for viewing the outside. Hall had just torn down and reassembled the radar under Martin's eye — no easy task in null-gee. "You'll do, son," said the captain.

Hall looked up unsurely. "Isn't it dangerous?" he asked. "I mean, not to have the radar going while we're on orbit."

"What in the Black Name for? You use your radar to help you approach a Wheelstar, that's all."

"But meteors — Look, the spaceships in the old days had a radar sweep hooked to an autopilot. When it spotted a meteor coming, it activated the blast and got out of the way."

"That was the theory," said Martin dryly. "In practice, you can't detect a meteor at sufficient distance to fix its orbit accurately. So the ship would make unnecessary swerves, use up her reaction mass, maybe not have enough for deceleration. These quick-transit paths, like our own right now, save time but waste fuel; maybe you don't know what a narrow safety margin we have. So it's a lot more practical to let your witch use her foresight and warn you hours ahead of time."

Hall exploded. His fist came down on the recoil chair's arm. Since he had neglected to keep a knee bent around the stanchion, he went cartwheeling into the air. Martin laughed, reached out, and drew him back.

"Take it easy, son," he advised.

"But — damn and blast it! You mean we're actually trusting our lives to a hysterical woman's hunches?"

"Don't slander your shipmates," said Martin sharply. Then, seeking tact: "After all, the probabilities are on our side. I admit foresight doesn't always work, but the chances of getting clipped by a rock are small anyway."

"I know," said Hall in a harsh tone. "I know that. But I also

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know that computer research could give us a radar-pilot system which would really do the job. And nobody's undertaking the research!"

"Matter of economics," shrugged Martin. "Let's say that failure of foresight costs us one ship a century — ten years' work by highly skilled men. Under present conditions, where precision tools are so scarce, it'd take maybe three years to build such a computer for *each* ship . . . quite apart from the time and brains which the initial research would tie up, and which are needed elsewhere.

"Thanks to those lunatics back in the Dark Ages, man's living on a mighty small margin. Someday we'll rebuild and have a big surplus, but meanwhile we have to struggle along with what we've got. And anyway, by that time foresight should be well enough understood to make your computer unnecessary."

The frankness in the blue eyes before him was of anger. "So you say! You and your witless faith! What was it pulled man out of the caves? Magic? Subconscious maunderings identified with revelation or foresight? Hell, no! It was working with, understanding and controlling, the real world!"

"Of course it was," said Martin. "I've studied history too, for your information. The first men to chart the stars were Babylonian astrologers. The Greeks developed geometry because number and relation were sacred things. The alchemists learned a lot about matter. European witches cured dropsy with toadskins, and South American medicine men discovered quinine."

"That's beside the point!" stormed Hall. "This ship couldn't have been built by . . . by magic. It could only have designed by a science which had discarded superstition."

"Well . . . let's say a science which made simplifying assumptions, thereby cutting the problem down to a size men of that epoch could handle. But the assumptions were obviously false."

"*False?* They were verified by observation!"

"Yeah? How about Newton's law of inertia? Pure fiction: there is and can be no body in the universe moving only by its own inertia. There are always forces, resisting media — For that matter, what is this energy the physics books talk about? Kinetic energy is motion, potential energy is position; but both position and motion are relative. How can any sane man believe energy is an absolute quantity when he can't possibly find a zero point?

"Energy, inertia, entropy, force — all the basic concepts of physics — they're mathematical constructs which give useful results. Identifying those equations with reality is mighty bad semantics."

Martin stopped, wishing he could tamp his pipe and blow dogmatic clouds; but —

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Spaceships, run by demon Fire,
swiftly feel the demon's ire.
Light no flame aboard the boat
lest smother'd Air's ghost grip
thy throat.

"Oh, you're glib enough," said Hall bitterly. "You know how to *use* an ephemerides or an elliptic function. But do you *understand* them? I doubt it. You don't see that the philosophy which created them denied your magical folderol."

"So it did," said Martin levelly. "And it was wrong, of course."

"But — damn it, witchcraft doesn't *work!*"

"The hell it don't, son. Every year the Utes make medicine to keep Earth on her orbit; and Earth stays there. Use your common sense."

"But you're arguing *post hoc.* In the old days, they didn't have those dances, and Earth still —"

"Oh, but they did. There were always backward tribes, so-called, hex doctors, witch-wives; there was always a little ritual, at least."

"How about the ages before there were any men?"

"That's been argued about. I incline to the will-of-God theory myself. God made man intelligent and turned over a lot of responsibility to him."

"But —"

"Look. What's the test of truth — the only test we have? Isn't it whether a concept works? Whether it gives the results it's supposed to?"

"Yes, of course. But —"

"So Base is taboo to non-initiates. They could meddle around with . . . oh, say a hydrazine tank and blow us all to Sathanas.

"So I dance around the orrery reciting astronomical equations. Result: I know them cold.

"So it's taboo to use nuclear blasts on Earth. You ought to know those blasts can be deadly.

"So a Stage One bears a hex sign. It compels whoever finds it, to return it to us. We can't build a new Stage One for every flight — we *have* to have them back!

"So people in general go through the rites, and observe the Law, and abide by the taboos. It gives them a sense of security; we don't have the unrest and the incidence of demoniac possession — I reckon you'd call it psychosis — they did in the Dark Ages. It keeps them in line, orders society as society has got to be ordered if it's to function without needing all the police and restrictive government they had in the past. It keeps people out of trouble: they may not know about radiation, most of 'em being illiterate, but they do know the Cursed Craters are forbidden. It makes them believe in the hex doctor, and belief is a big help in curing them.

"No, no, son. Magic works. You see it working every day of your life."

Hall leaned forward, triumphantly. His forefinger stabbed at the captain's chest. "Ah, hah! I've

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got you now! You're admitting that any value the rites have is merely pragmatic."

"No, I'm not," said Martin. "I'm just pointing out that there *is* a pragmatic, everyday usefulness . . . which is more than you can say for most of the Dark Age concepts. Besides this, of course, there's the matter of natural law. For instance, we carry a witch on every ship not just to reassure us, though self-confidence is important, but to—"

Hall shoved from his chair, violently, and went sailing out the exit. Martin stared after him. A worried frown grew between the captain's brows.

Similarity — Burn a man's photograph, and the man dies unless he has counter-spells. Believe you have foresight, and often you will have. Believe you are in a ship of madmen doomed by their own lunacies, and you may well generate doom.

Martin knew what would happen to him if he sent the Boss' nephew out the airlock. But he knew, as well, what *might* happen if he didn't.

Grimly, he weighed the probabilities.

Philip Hall went hurtling down the corridor and gulping for air. The thunder of his heart drowned the noise of ventilators, the million miles of loneliness vanished in his rage.

Blindness!

Always it had been there, the immemorial muttering current of Stone Age superstition. Don't break mirrors. Don't walk under ladders. Carry a rabbit's foot. Nail a horseshoe over your door. Turn back if a black cat crosses your path. Maybe the captain was right in one sense: maybe man was by nature a huddler in the dark, maybe reason was only a thin precarious membrane ripped apart by the first gust of fear.

They had come out of the caves, out of roadless mountains and tumbledown huts and tropical jungles, witches and warlocks spilling across the world. Science was smashed and discredited, the half-melted snag of a skyscraper stood against smoking heaven like a grisly question mark, there was no faith left in the wolves' den which Earth had become. Small wonder that bats should flutter about the heads of witches. Covens meet on high hills, blessings and blastings chant from withered lips; small wonder that the race had turned back to its first beliefs.

But in God's name, now they had rebuilt; however small and weak, civilization existed again. How could they recreate what their ancestors had owned without the rational minds of those mighty dead? What would they ever be but barbarians till someone had lifted the night from their brains?

He saw Valeria afloat near her bunk, looking blank-eyed into nothing. Weightless, her skirt drifted about trim streaming legs. The fury congealed within him, hardened and cooled to a brittle crystalline mold.

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"Val," he said.

The coppery head turned to his, hazel eyes focused and a small startled smile tilted her lips. "Oh . . . hello, Phil."

"What were you thinking of?" he asked awkwardly.

"Never mind." Color stained the pale smooth cheeks.

"I'm afraid —" He stopped, hunting for words. "I'm afraid I just had a run-in with the skipper."

She bit her lip. "You should be more careful, Phil. I can't counteract your influence all the time."

"What influence?" He grinned sourly. "I'm making no converts, if that's what you're thinking of."

"It isn't. It's your . . . state of mind. I've been having ugly dreams; I hope they aren't forerunners."

"And it's my fault?" He felt a slumping. "I'm sorry. I — don't want to worry you."

"Well . . . maybe it's no doing of yours anyhow. Maybe we've run into bad medicine regardless." The girl shivered. "Sometimes I wish I'd never joined the Coven. It isn't always easy."

He wanted to spit. His fists gathered at his side. "It's not right," he mumbled. "I've seen enough witches . . . poor scared kids, tormented by their own twisted nerves . . . and now *you*."

"There are always those whose work is hard," she answered gravely. "Even in those old days you're so romantic about, there must have been people whose occupations wore them down." A hand fell shyly on his. "Don't be sorry for me, Phil. Witchdom has its compensations."

"Do you mean always to —"

"Oh, probably not. I'll doubtless be getting married eventually, if the right man comes along." She didn't meet his eyes.

"Now there," he gibed, "is one example of ridiculousness. Why should a biological incidental like virginity determine whether you have the Power or not?"

"It's not exactly an incidental . . . ask any woman. You might as well ask why it should determine whether I have children or not."

They were drifting free, moving slowly on air currents in an empty wardroom. The hex symbols covering the walls spun in the man's vision as he turned. Somehow, it was a dream, this floating in stillness was not altogether real, and —

And in a dream —

He pulled her to him, roughly, and kissed her.

He felt how she stiffened. Then her struggle sent them awhirl in the air, caroming off wall and floor with a brutal force. She clawed after his eyes and he let her go, appalled at the savagery. She drifted from him shuddering and crying.

He pushed against a stanchion and arced toward her. "I'm sorry," he said frantically. "I didn't know —"

Through shaking hands, she answered: "There's a d-death penalty for that . . . molesting a, a, a witch on orbit —"

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Strength drained from him, he hung soul-naked while the hungry vacuum pressed close to the hull around.

"No," he said. "Not for . . . I didn't —"

"I . . . oh . . . I w-w-won't report you . . . but —"

"I'm sorry," he whispered. "It — Val, will you marry me? When we get back to Earth, will you marry me?"

"You s-s-s-*superstttious* oaf!" she gasped. "You blundering idiot!"

Something like pride chilled in him. "Go ahead," he said dully. "I won't hide behind your skirts. Go ahead and report me. I suppose it's regulations you should."

She nodded. Her voice came muffled, where she wept into her hands. "It is. But I . . . can't." With a puppet-like jerk of one arm: "Go away! Go away and leave me alone!"

He was halfway down the corridor when he heard her scream.

They gathered in the wardroom, four men clamping fear behind their faces, and looked at her.

"You're sure?" asked Martin.

Valeria nodded. Her eyes were red, but she spoke in a steady monotone: "Yes. There's no mistaking that kind of foresight."

"A meteor swarm," said Martin. "A meteor swarm on a collision orbit, an hour away."

Silence was thick between them.

"Can we dodge it?" asked Peralta.

"Oh, yes," said the girl joylessly. "It's a big swarm, but fifteen minutes at full acceleration would get us out of its path."

"And then we'd have to get back on orbit," said Martin. "We wouldn't have enough reaction mass left to brake at Mars."

Dykman turned ponderously in the air. Small light eyes burned at Hall. "It's your doing," he said. "You brought this on us."

"I never —" Hall raised his hands, as if to fend off a blow.

"Oh, yes, you did. You and your superstitions. They nullified our warding spells. What are the chances against this happening by accident, captain?"

"Mighty big," said Martin. "Mighty big."

"Out the airlock!" It was a shriek from Peralta.

Hall felt the bulkhead solid at his back. He lifted his fists and said between his teeth: "Because a hysterical female thinks we're running into danger, you'd kill a man. Well, come on and try it!"

Grayness rode Martin's voice: "Shut up there. Val, would executing him affect our chances?"

"No," she said. "It's too late now."

Martin regarded her for a long moment. "Is that the truth, or are you covering up for the boy?"

"I'm the witch here, skipper!" she flared.

He nodded, as if tired out. "Okay. Okay, I'll take your word for it. We're all in this together. It might

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not be Phil's fault anyhow. Could just as well be a slip-up at Base, or a foreign warlock, or — Val, is there anything we can do?"

She hung unmoving while a clock hand swept out a full minute. It might have been a century.

"It's an old comet with a very long-period orbit," she said then. "That's why it's never been encountered before." Her eyes closed, and her face tautened with strain, and she spoke as if from lightyears away. "There are about a hundred boulder-sized meteors and a lot of cosmic gravel. We can dodge the big ones —"

"But the gravel! It can punch more holes in the ship than we could ever patch."

"Perhaps," she said, "I can handle the gravel."

Hall let her open a vein in his wrist and take blood from him as she did from the others. The rest of her preparation was done in secret; he caught a reek of acrid herbs and heard her chanting in some saw-edged language unknown to him.

"Strap in," said Martin curtly.

He led the girl to the pilot room and buckled her into a recoil chair. Her hair floated red and wild about a head which had become a mask of otherness. Her hands were smeared with blood; she gripped an ivory wand between them and moved it about with strange precision for one whose eyes were shut.

"Take your seat," she whispered.

Martin strapped in and rested his fingers on the controls. Stray thoughts drifted through his skull: Ginny and the children, a tree they had in their back yard, a farewell party to which all their friends had come. It was a broad and lovely world he had, and bitter to leave it for an unknown darkness.

Her incantation mumbled forth. *Abaddon, Samiel, Ba'al Zebub, Beli Ya'al, all great horned spirits aid us.*

"The gyros," she breathed. "Alpha, zero zero three . . . Beta, one zero two . . . Gamma, as is . . . set for thirty-second half-blast —" The ship spun about the axles of the whickering wheels. "*Go!*"

Thunder and shrieking erupted about them. A troll's hand thrust them back into the chairs. Then there was again silence and falling.

Martin put his eyes to the periscope hood. He saw one of the meteors, miles away, sunlight wan off its pocked face. Suddenly it had hurtled past, thunderbolt without voice.

"Alpha, five zero one . . . Gamma, zero three three . . . ten-second quarter-blast . . . *Go!*"

There was a haziness across the hard unwinking stars, a million and a million planetary shards. No bigger than his thumbnail, but at their speed —

"We're clear of the meteors," said the toneless witch-throat. "We'll miss them all on this orbit. But —"

"The little stones. I know, Val. Can you turn them?"

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"Get out," she said.

He unbuckled and pushed from the cabin as softly as possible, closing the door behind him. She was beginning a new chant.

Peralta, Dykman, and Hall turned their eyes to him as he entered the wardroom. Their faces were drained.

"You can crawl out of that webbing if you want, boys," he told them. "We're on a free-fall path, safe from the big rocks."

"But how about the small ones . . . the gravel cloud?" Dykman licked sandy lips.

"That's up to Val." Martin shrugged. "I saw quite a density; normally, I reckon a thousand or so'd be hitting us. None of 'em are very large, but the relative velocity is up in miles per second."

They freed themselves and hung in air like fish in a tank. Peralta had his patching kit handy; he could repair a dozen or so leaks. There was no point in donning spacesuits, which only carried two hours' air supply.

Hall spoke, raggedly: "Captain . . . how do you *know* there is a swarm out there?"

Martin blinked. "I saw 'em. Looked through the periscope."

"Did you? Or did you see what you'd hypnotized yourself into seeing?"

There was another stillness. Sweat beaded Hall's face. He brushed some of it off, and the drops spun cloudily about his head.

"You—" Peralta bunched his legs for a lunge.

"That'll do!" snapped Martin.

There was a crack like thunder. Their eyes did not register the streak till it was past. Two bullet-holes with melted edges glared at each other across the room, and the air smelled scorched.

Peralta whirled, clapped an adhesive patch over each, and saw internal pressure bulge them. Another explosion resounded down the corridor. He went off to find the punctures.

"Now do you believe?" asked Martin gently.

Hall covered his eyes.

"Two hits," said Dykman. "Two hits she didn't stop."

"There are plenty she did," answered Martin. He drew a long shuddering breath. "Hang on. We'll be through the cloud, whole or dead, in another couple of minutes."

Peralta returned. They hung there, waiting. None of them looked at Hall. Now and then the ship clanged like a smitten gong, pebbles bouncing off the hull with too much velocity lost to penetrate.

The supercargo raised his face and stared into hollowness. "It . . . seems . . . I was wrong," he said.

"It's okay," said Martin. "You're just a young fellow, Phil, and your fallacy comes natural. All those historical novels — the Hooverian restoration, Eisenhower's duel with Hitler, atomic warlocks and naked women in Las Vegas . . . I sort of shared your romantic notions myself, once."

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"Fallacy?"

"About science working."

"But it does! I've tried it!"

"Sure it does. The *Phobos* here is proof enough. But the superstition was this, son: that science could understand everything, and do everything, and make everything good.

"I wonder how they could have had so odd a belief, even then. I wonder how anybody can look at Earth today and believe it. If you say a true concept is one that works, then your science-is-all was false — every radioactive crater, every mutant sickness, every monster born to a woman, proves that!"

They waited.

Valeria came in. Only in null-gravity could she have moved. The high cheekbones stood out as if flesh had been sucked from beneath them.

"We're safe." They could barely hear her speak. "I . . . the spells . . . turned the stones away. We're through them now."

Her eyes rolled up and she floated motionless. Hall cried aloud, incoherently, and went to her.

Martin, Dykman, and Peralta returned to their posts, to get the ship back on orbit toward Mars.

"It takes a lot out of you," said Valeria. "But I'll be all right in a few days."

Hall gripped her hand. They were alone in the wardroom, only the eyes of the hex signs were there to watch them.

He felt after words. It is never easy to admit you were mistaken. In principle, he still couldn't.

But . . . He tried to smile. "You needn't worry about me," he said. "I'll believe now that you can do everything."

"Oh, no. Only a few things," she replied hastily, and made a two-finger V.

"Enough," he said. "Enough to see us through. I'm surprised I never realized it before."

"The Covens don't operate openly," she told him. "Magic is best done in private. So all you've seen are dances, medicine, public ceremonies. You never saw a homunculus aware of what was happening a hundred miles away. You never saw two warlocks exchange thoughts without speaking, or . . . or a witch foreknowing potential trouble spots and deflecting meteors."

His jaw came forward, stubbornly. "I'm not convinced yet that there isn't a lot of superstition around," he said. "I have my doubts about most of the rituals. But I'm willing to be open-minded about them, and look for evidence in each case."

"That's sufficient. You'll make a good spaceman." Her eyes drooped, and she settled herself into the curve of his arm.

"Telepathy, precognition, psychokinesis, psychosomatics — they *were* almost ignored in the old days," he said thoughtfully. "Maybe believed-in rites are necessary to focus the powers of the mind. Maybe what

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man has needed was a chance to give them unhindered play, and to study them with the help of the logic which the age of science had developed."

Valeria laughed, very softly. "All right," she said. "If it makes you happier, if you think it's more scientific, to call magic by such names, go ahead. It's still magic!".

He tightened his arm about her waist, and she sighed and made no objection. In the face of the oldest magic of all, he didn't think she would remain a witch very much longer.

"Look! There it is again!"

The cartoon above, by Ronald Searle, appeared in his collection "The Female Approach," © 1954 by Ronald Searle. Best known for "The Belles of St. Trinians," Mr. Searle is one of England's foremost cartoonists and appears regularly in "Punch."

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John W. Vandercook is probably best known as a war correspondent, a lecturer and a news analyst for ABC. But he's also a writer of note, not only in the field of factual reporting, but also in fiction. (His delightful twenty-year-old adventure-detective stories, MURDER IN TRINIDAD *and* MURDER IN FIJI, *were revived last year in Macmillan's Murder Revisited series; and this year we're promised a brand-new one,* MURDER IN HAITI.) *So far as I know,* The Challenge *is his only fantasy, but an impressive one. When Ellery Queen awarded it a second prize four years ago, he called it "in many respects . . . the most significant story to come out of last year's — or any year's — contest"; and I think you'll find it unusually powerful in giving a deeper human meaning to a singular occult phenomenon.*

The Challenge

by JOHN W. VANDERCOOK

"COME IN! COME IN!" SINCE THE strained, high-pitched voice must be assumed to be his host's, Professor Nadelman obeyed. Though the knob turned readily, the big, white-painted door seemed extraordinarily heavy. Professor Nadelman put down his rope-tied cardboard suitcase so that he could use both hands. It was, he thought calmly, as if he were pushing against something soft — like a great weight of feathers.

The small, alert-looking man in tweeds who stood some paces back in the hallway was staring into the angle behind the now half-opened door. Professor Nadelman looked. There was absolutely nothing there.

"Try it, please. Again!"

This time the door swung easily. Professor Nadelman opened it all the way, then closed it. The obstruction, whatever it was, had disappeared.

With a visible effort Mr. Pelerin recovered himself and put out his hand. The two men frankly surveyed each other.

Professor Nadelman, as he had expected, found this distinguished American art critic to whom he was already so enormously indebted entirely to his liking. Mr. Pelerin's gray eyes flashed intelligence. His closely trimmed dark hair was graying. His slender body radiated en-

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ergy. An air of preoccupation, Professor Nadelman put down to nerves.

For his part Mr. Pelerin was shocked. He had expected to be shocked. But not like this. The world-famous authority on the Renaissance was a scarecrow. Even though Professor Nadelman was thinner than any human being he had ever seen, the suit of cheap black shoddy he wore was many sizes too small for him. The hawk-like, learned face was literally gray. Since Mr. Pelerin had heard no car, Professor Nadelman must have carried his heavy suitcase from the depot. It was unbelievable. But — he had pushed back the door.

Nadelman saw the look of astonishment.

"You must not, my dear benefactor," he said in his gently accented English, "be concerned about me. I have great endurance. I learned it," he smiled faintly, "in an excellent school. Believe me, I am very well."

Mr. Pelerin took both his guest's bony hands in his.

"And you, I beg of you, must never think of me, much less call me, your 'benefactor.' When I heard — when all our own little world — heard that you were still alive —" Mr. Pelerin's smile was charming. "'There was great rejoicing.' You will stay here as long as you choose. When you feel able we shall work. I am alone. It is a big house."

"It is," said Professor Nadelman politely, "a very beautiful house."

"It was a hideous house," said Mr. Pelerin sharply. "Grotesquely, almost brutally, ugly. I bought it because the land was good and the village charming. The house was a challenge. A problem in practical esthetics. All my adult life I have taught what we so mincingly call 'good taste.' This was my chance to learn if I could apply my preaching."

"You have," inquired Professor Nadelman slowly, "won?"

Mr. Pelerin looked at him acutely. Nadelman's English, he knew, was faultless. His brilliant *Age of Alexander VI* had been written in it. Nadelman had not said "succeeded." He had said "won."

"I am not sure," said Mr. Pelerin. "I am not at all sure."

"Perhaps," suggested the emaciated scholar, "I can assist." His mouth, though gentle, had unexpected firmness. "I am not —" Apologetically Professor Nadelman stretched out his right arm so the sleeve of the scanty jacket slid up. On the underside of his forearm was tattooed, in blue, the number 53696. "I am not," he repeated, "without experience."

Mr. Pelerin's taste was exquisite. What he had brought to this house in a New Hampshire village represented the accumulation of years of discriminating travel. The rugs, pale Ispahans and robust Bokharas, were like old gardens. The small El Greco *View of Toledo* over the Adams mantel, which Pelerin had discov-

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ered in a Cordoba junkshop, brought real tears of pleasure to Elias Nadelman's eyes. But the stench, the pain of Buchenwald and the rat-like life he had led since then in the ruins of the land he had once thought his, had sharpened new perceptions. All that Pelerin had done was a thin glaze. For all his skill, he had disguised this house, he had not yet changed it. The spirit of the place still leered with sullen and unresting anger through the hand-blocked wallpapers and the triple coats of dove-gray paint. Nadelman could feel the weight of it.

Though Mr. Pelerin concealed the fact with the urbanity of the man of parts he was, his guest could see he was uneasy. In a lesser man, the word would have been fear. It was an emotion Elias Nadelman had known well. But that had been long ago. . . .

After dinner and a short hour of talk before the open fire — for the spring night was chilly — Mr. Pelerin suggested they retire. Early bedtime, he explained, was a village custom into which he had readily fallen. With characteristic thoughtfulness he did not offer to escort the older man to his room. The host-and-guest relationship, he had resolved, must be abolished at once. The exile must be made to feel this house was his.

Professor Nadelman was glad that he had not been escorted. For he saw the weight the moment he switched on the light in his bedroom.

The center of the white candlewick spread on the spool bed was depressed, as if a dog were lying on it. Professor Nadelman strode forward and, leaning, seized the spread's four corners and brought them together. Though the weight — he had not expected it would be so great — made him stagger, he turned swiftly and swung the sack-like bundle with all his force against the edge of the half-open door.

There was no sound. But, as if water ran from it, the spread grew lighter. In a few seconds it was empty. Professor Nadelman shook it out, folded it neatly, and hung it over the back of a chair.

The bed was the softest in which he had slept since the hard and heavy men in black boots had come one summer night to his house just off the Ringstrasse, which he had never seen again, and taken him away. That had been twelve years ago. In those years he had learned much.

It was true, he was a little tired. The bony arm marked with the five blue numbers reached out and turned out the light.

. . . It was curious, Mr. Pelerin reflected. It was very curious indeed. He should feel that he was Nadelman's protector. The guest was older. Whatever he might say, he looked inconceivably fragile. He

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was penniless. Instead, it was Nadelman who gave him assurance. Starved and horribly beaten scarecrow though he was, he exuded calm, confidence — yes, survival. It was good to have him. Mr. Pelerin said so.

He did not say why.

In the year he had spent in Cloverly, New Hampshire, the only real friend Mr. Pelerin had made was a doctor who lived across the street.

Doctor George Gage, his graying-reddish hair and his tweeds both looking as if they had been deliberately mussed, and clutching his scarred old faggot of a bulldog pipe in his strong teeth, strolled over during the morning when they were walking in the yard.

Together the three men surveyed the house. The new owner had painted it a gleaming white. With his quick gestures and birdlike energy, Pelerin explained that once it had been red, the color of dried blood; that he had removed a veranda, two turrets, and rods of fretwork. Despite his efforts, he had not been able to make grass grow within twenty feet of the foundations. Perhaps it was because he had not yet brought himself to cut down the giant black spruces which surrounded it.

Unlike most householders, Mr. Pelerin did not seem to expect praise.

It was as well. The big box of a place was still too high, too square. Its windows were too narrow. They stared like slitted, baleful python's eyes.

It was Mr. Pelerin's custom to spend a certain time each day at work in his study. Since it seemed, when the hour came, that Pelerin was hanging back, Professor Nadelman made an excuse to accompany him. The door opened. There was no obstruction nor any indication of an abnormal presence. Then Nadelman walked across the shaded street to call on Doctor Gage.

Gage greeted him in a cluttered surgery. "Come over for a check-up?"

The refugee, the tips of his long, thin fingers together, shook his head. "One of the best physicians in Europe assured me I am imperishable. So was he. We were fellow prisoners."

Doctor Gage chewed his empty pipe and nodded. "Our friend?"

"Not yet. The house itself. Who has lived in it?"

Reflectively, Gage tapped the pipe in the palm of his left hand. "Pelerin's the second buyer since the Mullens. The first was a retired farmer. It was too much for him. Too hard to take care of. He let it go back to the bank for a small mortgage. Before Pelerin came along the place had been empty for twelve years. A terrible eyesore. Pelerin's done wonders."

"There was," his visitor inquired, "no other suggestion?"

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Gage peered at him under shaggy eyebrows. "Any fanciful suggestion, you mean?"

Professor Nadelman smiled. "I spent, my dear Doctor Gage, eight years in Nazi prison camps. It is an experience which does not encourage — fancy. These Mullens? Who were they?"

Gage teetered back in a battered chair supported by a coiled black spring. "They were dinosaurs. The old man came here back in the nineties and built that house. You've not been here long enough for it to have any implication when I tell you they built a factory. You can see what's left of it down by the depot. But this is an old town, a quiet town, in the middle of good farming country. It needed a factory about as much as it needed typhus." Gage paused and sucked at his cold pipe to sort and simplify his tale. Then he continued. "There was the old man and his son. Two-hundred-pounders, both of 'em. Black hair, big hands, and sharp little pig's eyes. They were partners. In business and under the skin. They hated each other's guts. It was in the days of free immigration. They got their labor from New York. Droves. As helpless and confused as cattle. They always took care to bring more than they wanted, so there'd be plenty without jobs. The town hated it. But the Mullens, I regret, waxed rich."

"And what," urged Professor Nadelman, "became of them?"

Doctor Gage studied the hawk-narrow but resolute face for a long moment.

"The old man," he said matter-of-factly, "went first. Crushed. The cable of an overhead crane gave way. A huge bucket of scrap iron."

"An accident?"

"Certainly! There was an inquest. Everything was perfectly clear. Since he and Frank — Frank was the son — were alone at the plant when it happened, there was gossip, of course. This is a small town, Nadelman. But it came to nothing." Doctor Gage snorted. "Then it really started. Frank had married. A slim blonde girl from one of those Boston banking families. No one could figure how he'd done it, but he did. He brought her back to that old red house to live. I liked her."

Gage looked down and meaninglessly whacked his pipe three times on the arm of his chair. "I almost loved her. Delicate. A lady. Yet all the courage in the world. Frank was ambitious. Nothing else. For I always thought he despised her. But it turned out old man Mullen had left her his share of the plant. Fifty-one percent. That made her Frank's boss."

Doctor Gage pointed. "You didn't see much through those trees. Or hear much. But you could guess plenty. Things at the factory began to change. Some of those poor devils got raises. They were on a 60-hour week. It was cut to 48. Frank looked like a black cloud."

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With elaborate care Doctor Gage put his pipe down on the desk. Professor Nadelman's eyes had already detected that the hand which held it had begun to tremble.

"Then one morning early I got a hurry call to come over. Frank, in his bathrobe, met me at the door." Gage broke off. "Funny. Funny reaction, I mean, but he held the door for some seconds before he let me in. All he said was that Carrie — that was her name — wasn't breathing when he woke up.

"Cyanosed, we call it. Possibly heart. Or, on the other hand, suffocation. That is to say, deliberate suffocation. Murder. I was supposed to sign the death certificate. I wouldn't."

Gage came to as complete a stop as if his narrative were ended. He filled his pipe from a brass-topped glass humidor on the desk and carefully lit it. Without taking the now belching briar from his mouth he said through the clouds of smoke:

"You must be very persuasive, Nadelman. I don't generally do this sort of thing. There's no good raking up the past. I want you to promise. Keep this between ourselves. Our friend over there is in a state of nerves. His control's first-rate, but I'm a good enough doctor to see through it. All this wouldn't do him any good. If he knows already — and I don't think he does — that's his business. But it's not mine. Or, if you'll forgive my saying so, yours."

Professor Nadelman inclined his head in agreement. He absently examined the palm of his right hand. It was as heavily calloused as a peasant's.

"Tell me, Doctor," he said quietly. "This courageous young lady, this Carrie — she fought back?"

Gage's astonishment made his pipe leap from between his teeth and land with a shower of sparks in his lap. He beat them out with unnecessary violence.

"What made you say that?"

Nadelman spread his hands. "The house was empty. The factory those strong men built is in ruins. Somewhere there was victory."

The doctor nodded. "There was. There was, indeed."

"Continue, please."

"Well, I didn't like it. Admittedly, I was only guessing, but I thought she had been suffocated. As if — well, as if by some big weight. Say, a body. I told Frank flatly I wasn't satisfied. I reported to the coroner and stepped out."

Gage, with his slow, bear-like movements, got up and stood by a window which looked to the dark trees and the gleam of the white house across the street.

"The morning of the hearing Frank Mullen sent for me. He was in bed, just his shock of black hair, his hard mouth, and those little pig's eyes of his showing. Even his arms were under the covers. In his bullying, snarling way, he ordered me to take his temperature. Noth-

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ing else. It was none of my business what ailed him and he'd get better quicker if I'd not meddle with him. All he wanted of me was my report he was too sick to go to court. You usually did what Frank Mullen told you. I did. I still remember. 105 point 2. He wasn't faking. The hearing was put off. It was two days before he sent for me again."

Gage came back to his chair. "A doctor gets tough. Has to. But Frank Mullen scared me. You could hardly recognize him. He was swollen. A kind of red-purple. What you could still see of his eyes burned like red coals. He was losing. He had lost. So he hated the whole wide world. . . . Not until he was dead did I have a chance to examine him. I knew what it was, but not why. Blood poisoning. We had no antibiotics then."

Gage put his pipe down to free both hands. Leaning forward, he shaped them into claws, reached up, and with startling violence ripped them downward through the air.

"On each of his arms, from the shoulders to below the elbows, were four parallel scratches. They had cut deep into the flesh. They had infected. They'd killed. They were made by the fingernails of human hands."

Gage nodded. "Yes, she'd fought back."

It was for Mr. Pelerin to choose, and obviously he had chosen. The guest would respect his host's decision. They would not speak of it.

After his first six weeks in Cloverly, Professor Nadelman became convinced that Pelerin was being tormented by the weight more and more frequently. In spite of his considerable gifts of self-control, the younger man was eating badly. His habit of inattention became more marked. Mr. Pelerin had high courage, but the invisible, soundless, formless persecution was wearing it away.

Professor Nadelman on the other hand began to encounter it less often. He thought he knew why.

The weight had no fixed timetable or locale. The door of a closet or a bedroom might, on opening, encounter ponderous, yet soft, resistance. At first Nadelman would simply force it open. That the terrible years had made him strong as tempered wire gave him wry amusement. Then he hit upon the trick of opening doors behind which crouched the unseen weight by a sharp, swinging motion, by a repeated hammering of the oaken panels. And that particular form of annoyance soon grew less.

Once, alone, he entered Mr. Pelerin's little-used formal drawing room and switched on the light. The floor was covered by a Chinese rug of singularly deep pile. Over an area of indeterminate shape, perhaps a square yard in extent, the wool threads were flattened. As he watched, the area began slowly to increase. In the light from the crys-

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tal chandelier he could see the erect tufts of the carpet lie down one by one and, as it were, harden, until the jute fabric underneath began to show.

He darted into the hall and came back with a bamboo walking stick. With all his strength, he began to flail, to whip, the place on which the weight rested. The cane met no resistance. Each blow was completed against the rug. But instantly the area effected began to shrink. The tufts stood upright. In a moment, when Professor Nadelman paused for breath, it occupied no more space than could be covered by two spread hands.

Pelerin had heard him and was standing in the door, his hands clenched, his eyes staring, his lips sucked in. Before the professor could resume his offensive, the weight, with startling rapidity, sped across the room — its progress revealed by the flattening of the rug — until it came to a blind wall and disappeared.

To Nadelman the demonstration seemed complete. Clearly, the weight felt pain. Under counterattack, it fled. Pelerin was a man of intelligence. Nadelman must assume the lesson was not lost on him.

The two men walked in silence to the library. When Mr. Pelerin poured brandy his hands shook so that the neck of the decanter rattled a thin and frightened tune on the goblets' rims. Neither spoke. But both, now, had seen it. It was real.

It was Nadelman's conviction that the weight was hostile — to the changes in the house, *its* house, which Pelerin had made. And to them. It was also his belief the weight was subject to certain laws. Proof soon came.

In the room with the Adams mantel stood one of Mr. Pelerin's most prized possessions, a Louis XV occasional table whose carved legs tapered to the diameter of a fountain pen. Pelerin owned many things of more value, but nothing of greater delicacy. The whole perfect, useless thing could be lifted by two fingers.

The two men were at lunch when they heard the reverberation of the bass keys of a piano, as if a cat had jumped on them, then, seconds later, the crash of splintering wood.

The little table, an irreparable ruin, lay in fragments on the floor. They were just in time to see the fringed corner of a rug twisted aside by the weight's passing, before it disappeared.

The table had been crushed from the top downward. It was plain how it had happened. Mrs. Humphries, the woman from the village who "did" for them, in cleaning that morning had left the table away from its accustomed position close to the rosewood piano. A small footstool had been moved near the piano bench.

The weight, then, was like a variable quantity of soft, invisible putty, but a putty of concentrated mass

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which — no word quite fitted — *poured* itself forward and even upward; but it was subject to the laws of gravity. It had forced itself onto the footstool, then onto the bench, then by way of the keyboard onto the piano, whence it had dropped down upon the table. The act was one of pure vindictive vandalism.

Professor Nadelman had to speak. "My dear friend," he said gently, "are you very sure you are right? Not desertion. I would not propose it, but perhaps a short absence?"

Mr. Pelerin's voice, though it shook a little, was steely. "Elias, I am not a coward."

The elderly, emaciated refugee inclined his head.

But he was worried. His generous savior, now his friend, was showing the strain. Slight in build at best, Pelerin was visibly losing weight. His skin was a bad color. With the coming of the still July days he began to complain fretfully of the heat. In words Pelerin revealed nothing, but fear was peering through his eyes. Though the weight now avoided Nadelman almost completely, its remorseless, secret war upon his host was fast reaching, the professor began to believe, a mortal stage.

Then he was certain.

Pelerin was in his study. Through the closed door Elias Nadelman heard a high and piercing scream that in a mere instant choked into terrifying silence.

Mr. Pelerin sat at his big, leather-topped Sheraton desk. He had fainted. He had been examining a Chinese painting by separating with both extended hands the two sticks on which it was tightly rolled. His head lolled forward but his hands, the fingers wide, were still pressed hard upon the antique painted silk. The two rolled ends of the painting were flat and crumpled. The weight lay on them.

An Elizabethan dagger which Pelerin used as a paper cutter lay on the desk. With a pounce Nadelman took it and with swift yet carefully controlled savagery stabbed and stabbed again through the air just above the desk. Instantly he saw the blood flow back into Pelerin's pale hands. Released, they slid back across the desktop and fell supinely in his lap.

Nadelman could not be sure. It may have come from Pelerin's unconscious lips. But he thought he heard a moan.

An hour later he rang Doctor Gage's bell.

Without preamble or emotion Nadelman described the incidents of the preceding weeks — from the formless, invisible mass which had tried, harmlessly, to oppose his first opening of Mr. Pelerin's door to the physical assault which had just taken place.

When he had finished, Gage smiled, but only with his mouth.

"I assume, Elias," he said, "you didn't come for my opinion?"

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"No, George."

"As a physician," Gage persisted, "and for the record, I suppose you know what it is. You and Pelerin are suffering from a collective hallucination. Why you are, or why it's taken this form, the good Lord may know." He held up a grizzled, capable hand to ward off interruption. "I know that between the two of you, you've got four times my brains. In these things, though, intelligence isn't a safeguard. Understand me, now. Diagnosis, right or wrong, doesn't alter anything. A fact of the mind is no less a fact than an aneurism. Maybe I'm just a country doctor, but I do know that. Let's simply say a condition exists. The point is, how do we treat it? What do you want of me?"

"I want you to send him away. I'm afraid."

Gage looked at him appraisingly. "And you don't scare easy, do you, Elias?"

"I'm afraid," Nadelman amended, "for our friend. Not for myself."

The late afternoon sunlight streamed in the tall upstairs windows. Mr. Pelerin was in bed. His eyes were closed, his clever face against the white pillows looked thin and drained of strength. His hands were outside the sheet that on this summer day was all the covering needed.

Doctor Gage stood looking down at him. It had been thirty years since he had come into this room. Then it had been all somber darkness. Now it was all light. . . . Obscurely, he was not so sure that it had changed.

Suddenly his eyes sharpened. Leaning, he picked up Pelerin's hands and put his face close to them. Putting them gently down, he summoned Nadelman to a far corner of the room.

"His hands," Gage whispered hoarsely, "are bruised! One of the nails has begun to darken. It's as if they had been crushed."

The professor smiled. "By an hallucination, doctor."

Mr. Pelerin spoke from the bed. The voice was so much his own, still so full of nervous force, that both men started.

"George! Elias! I beg of you! Surely at your time of life you should both know there is nothing so intensely irritating to an invalid as a whispered consultation. Especially when the invalid isn't ill."

Rather tiredly, Mr. Pelerin pulled himself higher on his pillows and cautiously laced the two bruised hands behind his head. "Come closer, both of you, so I can talk to you." He studied their faces for a moment before he went on. "You are both interested in my ailment. I can tell you what it is. Though the form —" Mr. Pelerin drew his hands from behind his head and held them motionless in the air for an instant before he put them back, "— though the particular form," he repeated, "is unusual, the complaint, I fear,

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is common. It is called — failure."

Pelerin looked away from them, his eyes clouded with reflection. "I have attempted to replace ugliness with — though the word has grown shabby I must use it — with beauty. Force — with grace. Strength with — what shall I say? — intelligence. The undertaking is notoriously hard. I have not succeeded. So one day I shall die of it."

"Nonsense!" In Doctor Gage's own ears the exclamation sounded strangely loud. He hurried on in a more normal tone. "You're tired. You've used yourself up, that's all."

Mr. Pelerin smiled, as if from far away. "So what, George, do you prescribe?"

"Rest. Distraction. For a month or two anyway you've got to go away."

"Go?" said Mr. Pelerin. "You mean 'run.' It would not be practicable, George. One cannot flee one's own inadequacy. Elias, don't you agree?"

"Your only inadequacy, my dear friend," said Nadelman sharply, "is your — technique. You rely on courage. The antagonist despises courage. You are firm, patient. You put your trust in superior example. The error is common. If persisted in, not only you but all civilization may very well 'die of it.' The Brute fears only pain."

In a different tone, Nadelman persisted, "George is right. For a short time you must go away. Gain strength. Gather your resources. It will not be easy for you, but you must learn to fight back, to be as ruthless as the enemy. I think you should go quickly."

The tip of Mr. Pelerin's tongue crept out to wet his lips.

"Very well. Tomorrow."

Doctor Gage showed no disposition to go home. Nor to talk. Nadelman heard him wandering through the house, peering into concealed places and softly opening and closing doors.

They dined sketchily on a table in Mr. Pelerin's room. Since for the first time among them conversation limped, Nadelman talked at length about his chosen field, the Renaissance.

Afterward, all that remained in Doctor Gage's memory was one phrase:

"*Beauty was honored in a time of violence because it was defended with sharp steel.*"

While Gage sat with Mr. Pelerin, Nadelman made his preparations for the night.

In the cheap cardboard suitcase he had brought from Europe was a whip. The handle was short, the butt of lead, and the woven lash of discolored leather about six feet long. It was a curious souvenir for an elderly professor of esthetics to have kept. He had picked it up at Buchenwald where Block Leader Hansel had dropped it in the hurry of his departure at the news that the Americans were near. The black

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whip had cut so often into Nadelman's own skin, been stained with so much of his own blood, that he knew it intimately. Since then, he had learned to handle it.

Secretly, but with no shame, Professor Nadelman had always hoped for an opportunity to use it. There were debts it was unholy not to pay.

The distinguished author of *The Age of Alexander VI* rolled the whip tightly, hid it under his coat, and went to his host's room.

Mr. Pelerin was asleep. In a low voice Doctor Gage said he had injected a strong enough sedative to last through the night. Nadelman was not sure he approved but it was too late to object. After a little, saying he was to be called at any moment, Gage went home.

Professor Nadelman turned on the light in the ceiling and those by the mirror and the desk, so the room was a white glare. The chair he drew close to Mr. Pelerin's bedside was carefully selected. It was comfortable, yet not so luxurious as to tempt him into sleep. The manifestations of force were often cunning. He had taken care that every door in the cruel and sulking house was left ajar.

Elias Nadelman took the whip from under his coat. With a light shake he made it ready and laid it across his knees.

The hands of the tiny Limoges enamel clock on Pelerin's bedside table moved very slowly to midnight, to one, to two. At intervals Nadelman systematically moved his arms, his legs. He was not sleepy, but there was danger that without occupation his mind, his senses, might grow dull. The man in the bed slept without moving.

It was surprising that he noticed. It was a mark of the perfection of Pelerin's housekeeping that every hinge was oiled. The open door which gave onto the dark hall was slowly closing.

With a single leap the gaunt, prematurely aged man flung himself against it. The weight behind it made him grunt. Though his position was awkward he brought down the black lash of the whip into the emptiness outside with all the force he could summon. At the third stinging cut the door gave way so suddenly that Nadelman all but stumbled to his knees. At once he realized he had made an incomparably grave mistake. Nowhere, except in Pelerin's own room, had he left on any lights. Precious seconds were lost while he found and snapped the switch. Nadelman sucked in his breath. Never had the weight been so great.

Just at the head of the stairs that led into the darkness of the floor below, the gray rug was pressed down hard over a loosely circular area nearly five feet in diameter. With a vicious whistle and a crack like a gunshot, the whip lashed down on the floor. Nadelman felt a sense of high and impure joy. Instantly the weight flung itself down the steps. Though nothing was to be seen, the

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steps creaked, the heavy oak banister shook.

Nadelman, the whip ready, was after it, his bony wrists thrusting from the short sleeves, his shoddy jacket flying. Once more time was lost while the lean pursuer groped in the air for the cord of the hanging lamp which lit the lower hall.

As he found it, the nearby door to the drawing room, which opened inward, shut with a soft rush and a click of the brass latch. The weight tonight was moving more swiftly and with more appearance of intent than ever before. Twice in the next few moments Nadelman was sure he had stung it with his whip. The professor's lips were drawn back over his teeth, the skin of his face felt tight, and he was supremely happy.

In a silence unbroken but for the rasp of his own breathing and the whish and crackle of the whip, the chase led on. Two more rooms were traversed. In each he lost time switching on the light.

In the high-ceiled dining room Nadelman stopped. He was panting. All trace of the antagonist had vanished. The pleasant room with its shining oval of mahogany was snug, at peace. Nadelman could hear no creak or rustle.

Peering intently, he turned slowly around. A door into the cellar opened from an alcove at one end of the room. That, too, he had left open. He thought he saw it move. The fury — not just of the night, the house, but of the years — was hot in him. He was no longer thinking. With three long strides he reached the cellar door and stood staring down into the darkness. The door struck hard against the tense calves of his legs, his back. He staggered, missed his footing, and plunged down. His head struck the jagged foundation wall, and Professor Nadelman lost consciousness.

It was impossible to tell. But when his senses struggled upward out of the black turmoil of insensibility, it seemed to him he had been unconscious only a few minutes. With a cry of fear he stumbled to his feet. His left arm hurt acutely. A groping hand encountered the feel of warm blood on his scalp. Moaning with terror, he scrambled up out of the sour darkness, ran with great pumping strides of his long legs through the hall, up the next flight, and into Mr. Pelerin's room.

The sheets had been kicked into a tangle. One pillow was on the floor. Mr. Pelerin's hands were stiffly outspread, as if they had been arrested in the act of pushing. His face was purple.

For a moment the compound of despair, grief — above all, the knowledge of how he had been tricked — almost deprived Nadelman of sight. Seconds passed before his vision cleared. Pelerin was slightly built. The mattress and the rumpled pillow on which he lay were firm. Yet his light frame was pressed as deeply

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into them as if his body were a giant's. The weight still lay on him.

Nadelman had lost the whip. It must still be lying at the bottom of the cellar steps. He clawed his hands and with the energy of a madman began to scratch and rip and rake the empty air fractions of inches above Pelerin's face, chest, arms. He could feel nothing.

But he was winning. He was winning! Gradually his friend's contorted body *rose*. The inward slope of the spring mattress flattened. There was the faint sound of sucked-in breath. Pelerin was still alive. The weight had withdrawn.

There was a phone on the desk. Doctor Gage answered the first ring. In two minutes — clearly he had not undressed — he was in Pelerin's room. With hairy, clumsy hands suddenly turned skillful, he injected a stimulant; then pressed, relaxed, and pressed again on Pelerin's lower ribs. At last, satisfied, the doctor straightened the tangled sheets and made the still unconscious man comfortable. Not until he was done did he face the other man.

His eyes dark with hostility he took in the Jew's dust-smeared clothes, his panting breath, the blood upon his head.

"You knew, of course," Gage said harshly. "Last week Pelerin made a will. I witnessed it. He leaves you everything." He jerked his head. "You'd better go. I'm going to stay right here all night."

The import of the words made Nadelman physically reel. The fine head with the arched hawk-nose drew down between his lifted shoulders, his hands opened in a gesture of false obedience, of mocking submission as old and as little understood as time. Without a word Elias Nadelman turned and walked away.

In his own room, he did not turn on the light. Still dressed, the wound on his scalp forgotten, he lay down upon his bed. . . . Was victory, real victory, impossible? He had thought Gage his friend. That look of hatred — what was worse, of unutterable distrust — when Gage had accused him of attempting the murder of his friend . . . it was as if he had seen it always. In Babylon. In Egypt. In Spain . . . In that moment the face of that good man had been the very face of force. The weight had many forms.

Of what use, then?

Of all use. The fight must never pause.

The scream sought him as if he were at the bottom of a well. Nadelman fought upward, as if through black waves of oil.

It was his name. "Elias! Nadelman! Elias! For God's sake, come!" It was Gage.

He was standing with his back against the wall, staring at the bed. Gage had left on only the night light on Palerin's table. Yet even in half-shadow the doctor's ruddy face was gray, his lips loose with fear.

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"Look!"

Even as he sprang to the bed Nadelman saw that this time he was too late. The weight had come again. And now it was going. Pelerin's body, slowly lifted by the released pressure of the springs on which he lay, was rising. In another second, with a queer limpness, it was free.

"Doctor!" said Nadelman.

With an effort, his movements made unsure by shock, Gage stumbled across the room. When he had listened to Mr. Pelerin's heart he shook his head.

As he put away his stethoscope his hands were shaking. "I fell asleep," said Doctor Gage humbly. "I am responsible."

During a perceptible pause Nadelman did not answer. "The weight, Doctor, made you its ally. The experience, alas, is not unknown. I, too, am guilty. Tonight I became not the defender but the aggressor. By that, I served its purpose and not mine. We must be most vigilant."

Not until the doctor, in the lighted safety of the living room, had gulped down a copious drink of brandy did he raise his eyes.

"There are some things," he said quietly, "for which you can't say, 'I'm sorry.' I thought this hocus-pocus . . . I can't think what got into me." He looked around him at the lovely room. "It's this house, Elias. Now that it's yours, in the name of Heaven, tear it down. Burn it!"

Professor Nadelman shook his head. "No, I shall stay. I shall —" he hesitated for a word: "— contend. And I think that I shall win.

"I do not pretend to understand," the professor went on calmly. "Here there was some focus. A concentration. A distilled and stubborn residue. But cruel force, the will to crush and kill, are as old as man. The forms are infinite. Sometimes open. Far more often, secret. Pelerin was gentle. He would not fight back. One must. *One must!*"

The thin old man smiled sadly, but his mouth was firm.

"I learned that, you see, long before I came here."

Note:

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In which the Sweet Singer of the Spaceways chants us a gallant tale of marital love, sudden disaster, and devotion beyond the call of duty.

The Captain's Mate

by EVELYN E. SMITH

"SOMETIMES, CAPTAIN," DEACON snarled, "I don't think you're even human." I looked at him. "Whoever said I was?" I replied, allowing myself to show an amusement I did not particularly feel. "Do I look human?"

At this, even the other men laughed. Deacon's face intensified in color. "You know what I mean," he retorted sullenly. "You have no feelings."

Feelings, indeed! What did this insignificant biped know of feelings! "My feelings are no concern of yours," I told him brusquely. "Similarly, yours are no concern of mine. You're paid to do a job, and I want that job done. . . . And take your greasy tentacles off my trunk!"

I pulled the chest out of his reach. It was my private property and I was damned if I'd let one of these monsters touch it.

"They're hands, do you hear me!" he yelled. "Hands, not tentacles, and I'll thank you to remember that!"

"I'll try to," I said, "if you will try to remember that I must be absolutely alone in the control room while I navigate. You know that's the shrlangi rule of space."

"I never heard it before," Spanier — the first and oldest of my three officers — remarked. "And I've been kicking around space a good many years."

So what if I was young — if I had got my wings only a couple of days before takeoff — he didn't have to rub it in. Age and experience weren't everything, although I was beginning to realize that they might have a certain utilitarian value. "Well, you're hearing it now!" I snapped. "You've never sailed on a shrlangi ship before, have you?"

"No," he said softly. "None of us ever has. Funny coincidence, isn't it?"

"Yeah," added little Muscat, "there's not one other shrlang aboard, even among the passengers. Just people, except for the captain. And most of the machinery wasn't made for human hands to work either." His voice was questioning.

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"I'm sure you must have heard that, of all the intelligent and semi-intelligent species, only humans can breathe the same atmosphere as the shrlangi," I condescended to explain, "and I had no intention of spending over a month with my head in a tank."

"That doesn't explain why you didn't hire any shrlangi as crewmen," Deacon pointed out. He was beginning to annoy me. "It's usual to have mixed crews. Are you . . . afraid of your own kind? And why won't you at least come down to the engine room and see what's wrong? You know it's your duty."

I looked at him level-eyed, though inside my chitin I was shaking. "Telling me what my duty is, Deacon? That smacks of insubordination. Let me remind you that the irons in the brig also were designed for tentacles; human limbs might find them a bit painful."

He bit the fleshy protuberances on the lower part of his face.

"Don't blame him, sir," Spanier put in. "After all, you can't deny that things do seem a bit — well — fishy. It is rather odd for the captain never to leave his control room, even in an emergency."

I banged an anterior tentacle on the instrument panel. "When you address me, Mister Spanier," I thundered, "you'll call me *ma'am*, not *sir!*"

"Yes, ma'am," he said softly. "I always forget I'm addressing a . . . lady."

I couldn't really blame him, for no doubt to them I was as hideous a monster as they appeared to me, and the idea of femininity in my species as ludicrous as the thought that these uncouth creatures could possibly be males. However, I had picked my crew and passengers precisely because they had had little, if any, previous contact with the shrlangi. It had never occurred to me that the alien life-forms I hired would have sufficient intelligence to notice any peculiarity in the arrangements, and I was frightened, feeling that perhaps I had bitten off more than I could masticate.

The easiest way to mask fright is with anger. "Get out of the control room!" I stormed, breathing heavily through my spiracles. "All of you!"

They left without quite closing the door. "Bugs," I could hear Deacon mutter. "Just bugs. There's something about this setup that stinks to high heaven; I'll swear that leak in the auxiliary fuel tank wasn't an accident. Somebody wants to slow us down . . . and the captain's been doing everything she can to louse us up since she boarded *The Space Queen*. I'd give a week's salary to know what her little game is!"

"Yeah," agreed Muscat. "And another funny thing — what happened to her husband? His name is on the passenger list but he never came aboard. If you ask me, she doesn't want to reach Methfessel III — she's afraid the law'll be waiting for her there."

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"But what good would all this stalling do her?" Spanier asked. "Eventually we'd have to make planetfall somewhere, and, wherever that was, the Intergalactics would be waiting for her. Give the gi — her a chance; maybe you're misjudging her."

"Sure," Muscat said. "Sure we're misjudging her. She's a wonderful — er — thing and a credit to space. So why won't she at least take a little trip down to the engine room and see what's wrong with the drive?"

"After all," the first officer told him, "this *is* a shrlangi ship and we aren't familiar with a lot of the equipment, or with the kind of alien mentality that constructed it. Maybe there's some good reason for all this."

"If you ask me," Deacon remarked harshly, "she doesn't know any more about running *The Space Queen* than we do. Two points off course already . . ."

At that point I got up and angrily slammed the door. Then I fished my copy of the shrlangi edition of the *Intergalactic Space Manual* out of my carapace and checked it against the bewildering banks of colored lights and dials that surrounded me in all directions. Deacon was right; the ship was two points off course. I corrected it — at least I hoped that was what I did. However, the possibility existed that she was now four points off course.

I set her on automatic. Then I got up and drew the chlorophyl-green silk curtains that obscured the observation port. Only a clear plastic bubble stood between me and the vast blackness of interstellar space through which I, virtually alone, was guiding the destinies of fifty-two reasoning creatures — I, who had never even seen a spaceship before in all of my sheltered life. Everything was incredibly empty and silent, except for the continuous, maddening whine of the engines in the background. I wondered, not for the first time in those two horrible weeks, whether I had not been a trifle impetuous in doing what I had done, too confident in assuming that I would be able to do it.

But what else could I have done to avoid disgrace for myself and everything I held dear? The answer was . . . *nothing.*

I closed the curtains and returned to my seat at the controls. I stroked the intricate chasings of the metal chest by my side, the chest that had been designed to hold my trousseau . . . for this voyage was to have been my honeymoon — the moment for which I had hoped and planned during all of my adolescent years. If only JrisXcha were by me to tell me what to do . . . but that was impossible now. Whatever happened, I would have to face the future alone.

There was a vast sense of unfulfillment inside of me that was more poignant than sorrow, more personal than infinity. Finally I realized it

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for what it was — I was hungry. The thought of food revolted me, but I must eat if I were to survive, and there were fifty-one life-forms depending upon me. From the stores in my locker, for I had known when first I set tentacle on *The Space Queen* that I would have to spend the whole month of the voyage virtually confined to the control room, I took a cake of compressed cpalKn and a container of vriClu . . . but when I tried to drink the liquor I gagged on it, remembering that, had it not been for JrisXcha's fatal predilection for that beverage, all this might not have happened. So I drank water instead and felt the better for it.

I tried to forget myself in music, so I played on my bnaIooo and sang a very beautiful song about the vast emptinesses of deep space . . . but my hearts were not in it. What good is a song with no one to sing it to? At last I laid the instrument away and sat tormented by self-doubting and loneliness. Would I be able to prolong the trip until the time was right — or would we run out of fuel and drift in space until all perished? Was I right to have risked the lives of so many others — mere humans though they might be — on the slender chance of saving face and reputation?

As if in answer to my question, suddenly a tremendous explosion flung me out of my seat and across the cabin. The ship shuddered violently, as if some giant tentacle had reached out from space to rock it. For a few minutes it twisted and turned in corkscrew fashion, while I clung to a stanchion. There was another mighty thump, and then the body of the ship relapsed into a continual shivering. Meanwhile, the whine of the engines had risen to an alternate roar and rasp, diversified by the occasional crash of machinery. Far, far away I could hear the thin screams of the passengers. It looked to me as if something certainly had gone wrong.

As I picked myself and the navigation charts up from the deck, the door was flung open and the three officers burst in. From the paleness of their faces and the fixed gaze of their eyes, I deduced that they were in a disturbed state of mind.

Spanier saluted. "Ma'am," he said tersely, "we just fell out of hyperspace."

"Dear me!" I replied. "I do hope we haven't fallen on anything breakable."

"We haven't fallen *on* anything, ma'am," Spanier said. "We have fallen *into* normal space."

"Oh, we have?" I wished I could consult my *Manual*. "That is bad, isn't it? Well — uh — can't we just continue on through normal space?"

He exhaled a long breath through his facial aperture. "We can," he said, "but it would delay the voyage a hell of a lot."

I exhaled a long breath through my spiracles. This was exactly what I had hoped to accomplish, and here

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it had happened all by itself! "We're not in any hurry," I pointed out. "The cargo isn't perishable."

"No, but we are. Via hyperspace we would reach Methfessel III in twelve days from now, give or take a day. The same trip through normal space will take us two hundred and eighty-three years, give or take a decade."

"Oh," I murmured, "that does sound rather long." I wasn't being authoritative enough. I cleared my throat. "How did it happen that we fell out of hyperspace anyhow? If someone was careless enough to drop us, it will bode ill for him."

"It was your fault!" Muscat burst out. "We tried to tell you all morning that one of the engines was on the blink, but you wouldn't listen. It finally blew up, and the detonation hurled us back into normal space."

"But we have three more," I protested. "Surely we can make do."

"The ship was built to operate on four, ma'am," Spanier said, "and it's much too heavy to get back into hyperspace on only three — especially since we lost so much reserve fuel before I could seal up the tank."

"Oh, yes," I said knowledgeably. Maybe sneaking down that evening while everybody was at the ship's dance and boring a hole in her side hadn't been such a good idea, but it had been all I could think of at that moment.

There was a snort from Deacon. "See, what did I tell you? Doesn't know a damn thing about operating a spaceship. Probably an escaped criminal taking a desperate chance."

"That doesn't really matter now," the older man said. "At the moment, all we're interested in is making planetfall.

"Ma'am," he turned to me, "our only chance of survival is to jettison the cargo and the passengers' and crew's gear. Everything that can possibly go must be dropped off. If we lighten the *Queen* enough, we might be able to get her back into hyperspace on only three engines. It's our only hope for making port. None of us can even try to fix the fourth engine now, because the shielding on the pile broke down and radiation is insidiously escaping."

I affected to ponder the question. "Well, if it must be done, I suppose it must."

"Thank you for your permission, captain," Spanier replied quietly, "although I'm afraid I wouldn't have waited for it if you'd refused. . . . All right, men, pick up that chest and heave it out of the airlock."

"Wait a minute!" I cried, flying across the room and clutching my trunk frantically with all six of my appendages. "Don't you dare touch this box, you — you *man!*"

Spanier looked at me. Both his eyes were steady. "In an emergency, ma'am, I'm afraid we can play no favorites. If necessary, we'll even use force. The captain's trunk must go

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over the side with everybody else's gear."

The others nodded emphatically. "It's about time we saw some justice done on this ship," Deacon said darkly.

"But you don't understand!" I almost shrieked. "It's not just a chest; it has — it is — it's *vital* — necessary for running the ship!"

Muscat thrust me aside rudely and laid a tentacle on the trunk. "By God!" he declared, stepping backward on Deacon's pedal extremity. "Something moved. There's something alive inside!"

"Ouch!" the big man yelped. "Ve-ry sinister," he went on. "Let's have it open and take a look before we heave it out."

This was a real emergency! I turned around and expertly stung the three of them in rapid succession. They staggered back, groaning. Taking advantage of their temporary disablement, I pushed them out of the control room and bolted the door. It would be a matter of minutes before they blasted their way back in, but by then I hoped my problems would be solved — or, at least, taken out of my hands. If only Muscat were right . . .

Hastily I unlocked the chest. But, if Muscat had been wrong, I was lost . . . we were all lost.

And, as I threw back the lid, it looked as if he had been wrong after all. The pupa inside appeared as brown and lifeless as it had been when I had tenderly placed it there. If it didn't open now it would never have a chance to open. "JrisXcha!" I cried, wildly wringing all of my appendages that I wasn't using to stand on. "JrisXcha! Can you hear me?"

There was a faint stir and a rustle. I held my breath. A crack appeared in the cocoon; slowly it grew wider and wider. I almost fainted with relief as the chrysalis split open entirely, and JrisXcha — my wife — soared out into the control room in a flash of iridescent glory. She had got her wings at last!

"What happened, FkorKo?" she demanded, lighting on the instrument panel and staring bewilderedly around. "Where am I? All I remember is that last jug of vriClu at our mating ceremony, and then — *wham!*"

"You're in the control room of *The Space Queen*," I told her. And for a moment I forgot the respect I had promised her at that same mating ceremony. "You fool, you knew perfectly well you weren't supposed to take alcohol of any kind for a week before pupation; your cocoon formed nineteen days too late!"

"But in that case I wouldn't have been an imago by takeoff time," she said, too bewildered to take exception to my pertness. "*The Space Queen* would have sailed under another captain, and I would have been droned out of the service — ruined. How did I get on it? And what are you doing in my carapace,

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FkorKo?" She began to laugh. "I must say, you look pretty damn silly in it."

"*I* matured in time," I explained, "because I was a clean-living larva, so I took your place. I could get away with pretending to be you, because the crew are all human — people, you know; I picked them specially — and the poor fools can't tell a male shrlang from a female."

My voice broke as the enormity of what I had done suddenly dawned on me. "B-but, in spite of everything I did, I'm afraid we'll never reach Methfessel III. I du-did everything I could think of to su-slow the ship du-du-down, and I'm a-a-fu-fraid I su-slowed her down pup-pup-pup-permanently!"

Now that I, no longer had to pretend femininity, I could break down and indulge in the luxury of prolonged ululation.

JrisXcha came over and put three appendages around my — rather, her — chitin. "Brave little fellow," she said in a voice choked with emotion. "I don't know what I ever did to deserve a husband like you. All I can say is, I certainly was a very lucky larva." She twined her antenna with mine. "Don't worry, egg; I'll get the ship in shape again — I didn't graduate *summa cum laude* from the Hexapod Space Academy for nothing. . . . What's that noise at the door?"

"Ih — it's the officers," I sobbed. "I thu-think they're probably coming to throw me — us in the brig."

She brushed me briefly with her feelers. "Don't worry, honey, I'll take care of this. Give me the uniform." I slid out of the carapace. She donned it quickly, while I draped myself in a sari out of the silk from her cocoon. Brown wasn't really my color, but I couldn't afford to be choosy.

JrisXcha slipped the bolts on the door and flung it open so suddenly that Deacon and Muscat fell flat on their faces, while Spanier only just managed to keep his balance. "Why the blowtorch, gentlemen?" my wife asked easily. "Surely a simple knock would have sufficed. I am not so inaccessible as all that."

Deacon's skin darkened. "Why, you . . ." he began, pointing his blaster at JrisXcha, as he rose from the floor in a half-crouch. I rushed forward, ready to throw myself between them and take the charge full in my thorax.

"Wait a minute," Spanier restrained the big man. "There are two of them now!"

They stared in bewilderment, first at JrisXcha, then at me, then at the chest, standing open and empty. "So that was why she wouldn't let us jettison the trunk," Muscat said slowly. "The other one was in it all the time. I'm sorry, ma'am; I wouldn't have been so — so rude to you if I'd known you were a mother."

"I'm not, actually," JrisXcha admitted, "but I hope to be, in the very near future." She was a quick

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thinker. "Gentlemen, allow me to introduce you to my husband, FkorKo." She pulled me to her side with two appendages. I lowered my eyes modestly, as a dutiful husband should.

"I'm sorry there had to be all this mystery, but the whole thing was a little embarrassing you know. And against regulations. A shrlang space-officer isn't allowed to bring any member of her family along while he is in — excuse the expression — the pupal state. Spouses are supposed to mature at the same time. Only FkorKo was taken suddenly ill," she said, trying not to catch my eyes, "and didn't go into the pupal state when he was supposed to."

"Oh," said Deacon, "he was in a cocoon, huh?"

"But why couldn't you have waited until he matured before you started the trip?" Muscat asked.

"Nothing is supposed to stop an officer from carrying out his duties. If I'd waited until he became an imago, I'd have lost my ship — and I'd never have got another. I'd have been cashiered and both of us would have become creditless outcasts. I do hope that I can trust you not to say anything about this . . . ?"

"I'll see that the men keep it to themselves, ma'am," Spanier said. "If we live to have any tale to tell. The ship's in a pretty sad state."

"Oh, I'm sure I'll have whatever's wrong fixed in a trice now that I can put my whole mind on it," JrisXcha assured him. "You know how it is — I was so worried about my husband I just couldn't think straight."

"Of course," Deacon said contritely.

"Gee, I can imagine," Muscat echoed. "If we had only known . . ."

I liked them even if they were human. They had feelings.

"And we won't hold it against you for stinging us," Deacon added magnanimously.

"Did I — er — I was so distraught I just didn't know what I was doing." JrisXcha pulled me close and brushed my antenna lightly with hers, although ordinarily she is not demonstrative in public. "I have a wonderful little husband," she said.

"But why didn't you tell us?" Spanier wanted to know. "No matter how we felt about you, we'd hardly throw out your husband's cocoon."

JrisXcha concealed a smile with an anterior tentacle. "Well, it was so hard to put delicately," she said. "You know, each life-form has its own taboos. . . ."

The other men looked reproachfully at Spanier. His skin reddened. "Sorry, ma'am; I didn't understand."

"Quite all right," she told him cordially. "You couldn't have been expected to know."

I repressed a nervous titter with difficulty.

"Now," she went on, "I'll just

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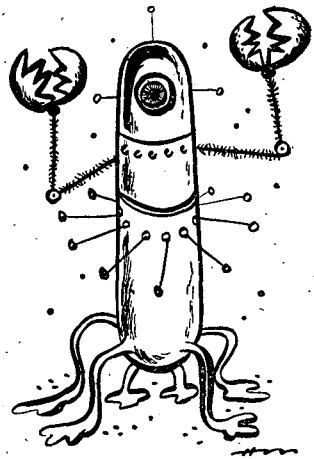
step down to the engine room with you chaps and have everything right in a jiffy. We shrlangi are unaffected by radiation, you know. . . . You just wait up here, egg, and, remember, don't put your pretty little tentacles on any of the machinery."

"No, honey," I vowed, "I'll never touch another piece of machinery again as long as I live."

My wife confidently led the way out of the control room. The three humans followed her dazedly. The situation was well in hand.

Spanier was the last out. Before he left, he turned and looked at me. "Mighty proud to know you, sir," he said. "Mighty proud." Stretching out a tentacle — a hand, rather — he grasped one of my middle appendages in his and vibrated it with, I instantly perceived, amicable intent. "You know, sir," he said, "if you're not familar with another species, sometimes it is hard to tell one sex, let alone one individual, from another. I suppose you have the same difficulty too. But, when you've worked closely with somebody, you get to know them, whether they're human or alien — and somebody you really know and like is never an alien."

He coughed and I could see that it was in embarrassment, because he was no longer an alien either. "What I'm trying to say is this," he concluded huskily, "bug or no bug, you're a great little guy . . . captain."



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The story of the wolves of Cernogratz is a simple legend that might have occurred to any number of writers; but who save Saki could have told it so well, or ended it with such precise malice?

The Wolves of Cernogratz

by SAKI

"ARE THERE ANY OLD LEGENDS attached to the castle?" asked Conrad of his sister. Conrad was a prosperous Hamburg merchant, but he was the one poetically dispositioned member of an eminently practical family.

The Baroness Gruebel shrugged her plump shoulders.

"There are always legends hanging about these old places. They are not difficult to invent and they cost nothing. In this case there is a story that when any one dies in the castle all the dogs in the village and the wild beasts in the forest howl the night long. It would not be pleasant to listen to, would it?"

"It would be weird and romantic," said the Hamburg merchant.

"Anyhow, it isn't true," said the Baroness complacently; "since we bought the place we have had proof that nothing of the sort happens. When the old mother-in-law died last springtime we all listened, but there was no howling. It is just a story that lends dignity to the place without costing anything."

"The story is not as you have told it," said Amalie, the grey old governess. Everyone turned and looked at her in astonishment. She was wont to sit silent and prim and faded in her place at table, never speaking unless someone spoke to her, and there were few who troubled themselves to make conversation with her. Today a sudden volubility had descended on her; she continued to talk, rapidly and nervously, looking straight in front of her and seeming to address no one in particular.

"It is not when *any one* dies in the castle that the howling is heard. It was when one of the Cernogratz family died here that the wolves came from far and near and howled at the edge of the forest just before the death hour. There were only a few couple of wolves that had their lairs in this part of the forest, but at such a time the keepers say there

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would be scores of them, gliding about in the shadows and howling in chorus, and the dogs of the castle and the village and all the farms round would bay and howl in fear and anger at the wolf chorus, and as the soul of the dying one left its body a tree would crash down in the park. That is what happened when a Cernogratz died in his family castle. But for a stranger dying here, of course no wolf would howl and no tree would fall. Oh, no."

There was a note of defiance, almost of contempt, in her voice as she said the last words. The well-fed, much-too-well-dressed Baroness stared angrily at the dowdy old woman who had come forth from her usual and seemly position of effacement to speak so disrespectfully.

"You seem to know quite a lot about the von Cernogratz legends, Fräulein Schmidt," she said sharply; "I did not know that family histories were among the subjects you are supposed to be proficient in."

The answer to her taunt was even more unexpected and astonishing than the conversational outbreak which had provoked it.

"I am a von Cernogratz myself," said the old woman, "that is why I know the family history."

"You a von Cernogratz? You!" came in an incredulous chorus.

"When we became very poor," she explained, "and I had to go out and give teaching lessons, I took another name; I thought it would be more in keeping. But my grandfather spent much of his time as a boy in this castle, and my father used to tell me many stories about it, and, of course, I knew all the family legends and stories. When one has nothing left to one but memories, one guards and dusts them with especial care. I little thought when I took service with you that I should one day come with you to the old home of my family. I could wish it had been anywhere else."

There was silence when she finished speaking, and then the Baroness turned the conversation to a less embarrassing topic than family histories. But afterwards, when the old governess had slipped away quietly to her duties, there arose a clamour of derision and disbelief.

"It was an impertinence," snapped out the Baron, his protruding eyes taking on a scandalized expression; "fancy the woman talking like that at our table. She almost told us we were nobodies, and I don't believe a word of it. She is just Schmidt and nothing more. She has been talking to some of the peasants about the old Cernogratz family, and raked up their history and their stories."

"She wants to make herself out of some consequence," said the Baroness; "she knows she will soon be past work and she wants to appeal to our sympathies. Her grandfather, indeed!"

The Baroness had the usual number of grandfathers, but she never, never boasted about them.

"I dare say her grandfather was a

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pantry boy or something of the sort in the castle," sniggered the Baron; "that part of the story may be true."

The merchant from Hamburg said nothing; he had seen tears in the old woman's eyes when she spoke of guarding her memories — or, being of an imaginative disposition, he thought he had.

"I shall give her notice to go as soon as the New Year festivities are over," said the Baroness; "till then I shall be too busy to manage without her."

But she had to manage without her all the same, for in the cold biting weather after Christmas, the old governess fell ill.

"It is most provoking," said the Baroness, as her guests sat round the fire on one of the last evenings of the dying year; "all the time that she has been with us I cannot remember that she was ever seriously ill, too ill to go about and do her work, I mean. And now, when I have the house full, and she could be useful in so many ways, she goes and breaks down. One is sorry for her, of course, she looks so withered and shrunken, but it is intensely annoying all the same."

"Most annoying," agreed the banker's wife sympathetically; "it is the intense cold, I expect, it breaks the old people up. It has been unusually cold this year."

"The frost is the sharpest that has been known in December for many years," said the Baron.

"And, of course, she is quite old," said the Baroness; "I wish I had given her notice some weeks ago, then she would have left before this happened to her. Why, Wappi, what is the matter with you?"

The small, woolly lapdog had leapt suddenly down from its cushion and crept shivering under the sofa. At the same moment an outburst of angry barking came from the dogs in the castle-yard, and other dogs could be heard yapping and barking in the distance.

"What is disturbing the animals?" asked the Baron.

And then the humans, listening intently, heard the sound that had roused the dogs to their demonstrations of fear and rage; heard a long-drawn whining howl, rising and falling, seeming at one moment leagues away, at others sweeping across the snow until it appeared to come from the foot of the castle walls. All the starved, cold misery of a frozen world, all the relentless hunger-fury of the wild, blended with other forlorn and haunting melodies to which one could give no name, seemed concentrated in that wailing cry.

"Wolves!" cried the Baron.

Their music broke forth in one raging burst, seeming to come from everywhere.

"Hundreds of wolves," said the Hamburg merchant, who was a man of strong imagination.

Moved by some impulse which she could not have explained, the Baroness left her guests and made

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her way to the narrow, cheerless room where the old governess lay watching the hours of the dying year slip by. In spite of the biting cold of the winter night, the window stood open. With a scandalized exclamation on her lips, the Baroness rushed forward to close it.

"Leave it open," said the old woman in a voice that for all its weakness carried an air of command such as the Baroness had never heard before from her lips.

"But you will die of cold!" she expostulated.

"I am dying in any case," said the voice, "and I want to hear their music. They have come from far and wide to sing the death-music of my family. It is beautiful that they have come; I am the last von Cernogratz that will die in our old castle, and they have come to sing to me. Hark, how loud they are calling!"

The cry of the wolves rose on the still winter air and floated round the castle walls in long-drawn piercing wails; the old woman lay back on her couch with a look of long-delayed happiness on her face.

"Go away," she said to the Baroness; "I am not lonely any more. I am one of a great old family. . . ."

"I think she is dying," said the Baroness when she had rejoined her guests; "I suppose we must send for a doctor. And that terrible howling! Not for much money would I have such death-music."

"That music is not to be bought for any amount of money," said Conrad.

"Hark! What is that other sound?" asked the Baron, as a noise of splitting and crashing was heard.

It was a tree falling in the park.

There was a moment of constrained silence, and then the banker's wife spoke.

"It is the intense cold that is splitting the trees. It is also the cold that has brought the wolves out in such numbers. It is many years since we have had such a cold winter."

The Baroness eagerly agreed that the cold was responsible for these things. It was the cold of the open window, too, which caused the heart failure that made the doctor's ministrations unnecessary for the old Fräulein. But the notice in the newspapers looked very well —

"On December 29th, at Schloss Cernogratz, Amalie von Cernogratz, for many years the valued friend of Baron and Baroness Gruebel."

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Elsewhere in this issue you'll find Chad Oliver's ANOTHER KIND *(Ballantine) listed as 1955's best collection of science fiction short stories. Here is a new Oliver to set beside such distinguished entries in that volume as* Artifact *and* Rite of Passage — *the latest in Oliver's essays in alien anthropology, posing a dual puzzle to the reader: What accounts for the contradictory culture discovered on Arcturus III . . . and what goes on in the soul of a hard-bitten bureaucrat who must measure the extent of a primitive people's claim to its own planet?*

North Wind

by CHAD OLIVER

THE HEAVY GLASS DOORS WHISPERED apart before him and Norman Mavor walked out of the hearing room. His formal blue suit was still crisply pressed, his straight gray hair neatly combed. He moved down the spotless corridor with a firm step.

Except for his eyes, he might have passed himself off as a man without a care in the world.

His eyes were green — not the shallow green of grass or leaves, but the deep, translucent green of the sea. The eyes were embedded in a lined, craggy face that had seen better days, and at the moment they were more than a little bloodshot.

He looked neither to right nor left, and people kept out of his way. If he heard the barbed comments that followed him down the corridor he gave no outward sign.

He took the private elevator to the roof and climbed into a copter with NORMAN MAVOR discreetly lettered on the sides of the cabin.

Then he waited.

He didn't smoke. He didn't fidget. His eyes were open, looking straight ahead, but it was impossible to tell what they were seeing, if anything.

He just waited.

Ten minutes later, a balding, red-faced dynamo of a man came panting up the little-used stairway, waved excitedly, and piled his somewhat globular form into the copter next to Mavor.

"We tied 'em in circles, Norm," Karl Hauser chuckled, his multiple chins dancing. "Old Fishface and the Development boys never knew what hit 'em!"

"You bet," Norman Mavor said

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icily. "We won those guys a quarter of their own planet without firing a shot. Ain't we grand?"

Karl Hauser beamed, undaunted. "Save it for the Old Ladies League," he advised. "You need a drink."

"With that I am in complete agreement. Sky Grotto suit you?"

"They sell alcohol, don't they?"

Mavor essayed a smile, not too successfully, and lifted the copter up into the sunlight that washed New York in yellow gold.

Two hours afterward, fortified by a predominantly liquid lunch topped by a drowning hamburger, Norman Mavor checked in at his private office near Lake Success. His grooming was still faultless; only the fact that the lines in his face were less strikingly obvious than before betrayed the lessening of the tension within him.

His office was chiefly notable for its utter lack of curios, gewgaws, knick-knacks, and assorted junk-gadgets. It was clean in its simplicity, and if its stained pine walls and hardwood floors lacked something in warmth, they could at least not be accused of pretense in any form.

There was one photograph on Mavor's desk. It was set in a neat silver frame, and it was a picture of a smug chimpanzee sitting cross-legged on a box.

The chimp's name was Basil, and there was a nameplate on the frame to that effect. Basil was one of the few remaining anthropoid apes; the orang and the gorilla were long extinct, and only a scattering of chimps and gibbons were left to hold the fort.

There was nothing special about Basil, save that Mavor liked the expression on his face. It was hard to take yourself too seriously with a chimpanzee on your desk.

Mavor sat down, and waited.

In precisely four minutes there was a knock on his door, which meant that someone had succeeded in getting past the small army of his assistants to talk to him personally. Mavor loathed the tri-di phone, and seldom answered it.

"Come in," he said.

The door opened and a young, very earnest man hurried in with a folder under his arm.

Enter Prometheus, bearing fire, Mavor thought. He recognized the man: Bill Shackelford, one of the field data analysts. Aloud, Mavor said, "Hello, Bill. How long before the end of the world?"

Shackelford blinked, but made a fast recovery. "I figure a billion years, give or take a few hundred million. Why?"

Mavor shrugged. "When people barge in here," he said, "it's generally a matter of life or death. The lot of the Integrator of Interstellar Affairs is not a happy one, as you may discover if you ever get kicked upstairs into my job."

"I do have something I think you ought to see, Mr. Mavor, or I wouldn't have bothered you."

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Mavor nodded sagely. "Let me guess. You have been checking a field report from one of our rover boys, right?"

"Well, yes. That's my job."

"And you have discovered something extraordinary, right?"

Shackelford sat down, as though he had lost some of the wind from his sails. "I didn't exactly discover it, Mr. Mavor — it's in the field report."

"Ah. Let's see now." Mavor tilted his old-fashioned swivel chair back and gazed at the ceiling. "One of the field men has stumbled across a rare item on — ummmm — Capella IV should be about due, yes?"

"No," Shackelford said with some relish. "It's from Arcturus III."

"Arcturus, then. It couldn't have been a plain old primitive culture, because that's too common to bring to my attention. It couldn't be an advanced civilization, in the usual sense, or I'd have heard of it long ago. So what does that leave us, Bill? Either a culture past the Neolithic and into an early urban situation, which might cover the planet without attracting our attention with radio waves or spaceships, or else — what?"

"You tell me, Mr. Mavor."

"Okay." Mavor tilted his chair forward again and put his elbows on the desk. "I'll tell you. The anthropologist on Arcturus has stumbled across something that looks primitive, but isn't. How's that?"

"How did you know?" Shackelford asked, visibly disappointed.

"Basil told me," Mavor said, nodding toward the photograph. "He's a very widely read ape."

Shackelford sat quite still, caught in that maddening impasse of the recently adult male: too old to walk out in a huff, too young to turn the tables with any master-stroke of daily diplomacy. "Well," he said finally, "I'm sorry I bothered you, since you have such a remarkable source of information already at hand."

Mavor squinted his green eyes, damning himself inwardly for his absolute inability to play the buddy-buddy to everyone. He rather liked Shackelford, he knew that the younger man would now go home and tell his wife about what a monster the boss was, and he knew that he had made an enemy. He already had an ample supply of the latter, but he couldn't function any other way.

The silence got tighter.

"I kind of thought you might be interested," Shackelford said finally, fidgeting on his chair.

"Go ahead and smoke, Bill," Mavor said, recognizing the symptoms. "I won't throw a tantrum."

Shackelford produced a cigar, ignited it with a puff, and carefully blew a cloud of smoke into a neutral corner. Mavor, who had been expecting the inevitable pipe, was pleasantly surprised — mentally, if not in an olfactory sense.

"Spill it," Mavor said. "What

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hath the Noble Savage come up with this time around?"

Shackelford flushed and started pawing through his official folder.

"Skip the technical jargon. Whatever you've got on Arcturus III, plain English will bore through to my addled wits."

The younger man chewed on his cigar instead of counting to ten. "According to Simpson — he's the anthropologist out there — they've got a culture that's still in a hunting and gathering situation as far as technology goes — no cultivated crops or anything — but at the same time they've got a terrifically complex *political* set-up."

"How complex is 'terrifically' complex?"

"They've got big ceremonial centers with resident political and religious officials; they run the show, according to Simpson."

"I take it that most of the people don't live in these centers?"

"No, most of them are scattered along the rivers. They just get together on sacred days and whatnot."

"Sort of like the old Maya?"

"The Maya were agricultural."

"Thank you." Mavor smiled faintly. "How many people are involved in this deal? One tribe?"

Shackelford frowned. "It's hard to tell. I get an impression that it's a bigger affair than just one tribe."

"You *get an impression*, hey? If you don't know, say so."

"Okay. I don't know."

"What else?"

"Simpson says he's on the track of something big, really big."

"Elephant? Hippo? Dinosaur?"

Shackelford retreated behind a cloud of cigar smoke. "He says they've got a lot of dope they shouldn't have."

"Ah, the Wisdom of the Ancients rears its ugly head. Are they splitting atoms with their stone axes?"

"Simpson isn't sure; he's just beginning his research."

"Ummmm. And what does he suggest we do about it?"

"More or less the Standard Procedure for cases like this. He wants us to declare Arcturus III off-limits for a one-hundred-year waiting period, until we're certain what it is we're butting into. The law says —"

"Basil keeps me posted on the law. What do you think of all this?"

"May I speak frankly, Mr. Mavor?"

"I would recommend it highly."

"Okay, then. I think this thing on Arcturus III is one of the most remarkable things I've ever heard of. These people aren't just a bunch of savages, Mr. Mavor — they're unique, they've done something nobody ever managed before." Shackelford leaned forward, his eyes bright. "They've earned their chance. Legally, you're their protector on Earth. It's your *duty* to keep our people off of Arcturus III. That's what I think."

Mavor didn't change expression. "At least you're not ambiguous," he said. "You can go now."

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Shackelford hesitated, then got up. His face was very white. He put the folder under his arm and started out.

"Leave the folder here if you will, please."

He tossed it on the desk and left, clearly flirting with an attack of high blood pressure and budding ulcers.

Norman Mavor punched the NO VISITORS button and opened the folder on his desk. He sat straight-backed in his chair, the crease in his trousers still razor-sharp.

His deep green eyes went to work — patiently, and yet not without a kind of steady ruthlessness.

He made occasional neat notes on white cards ready for indexing.

The hours passed, and Mavor hardly moved. He felt a cold knot tying itself in icy loops in the pit of his stomach.

Night came to the city.

On the other side of his office wall, a dark autumn wind whispered down from out of the north.

Mavor had strongly suspected that he was in trouble within minutes after Bill Shackelford had walked into his office. It hadn't been any sixth sense that had warned him, unless its name was Experience.

A preliminary reading of Simpson's report hadn't made him feel any better.

After three days of study, he was certain.

It wasn't the easiest trick in creation for any United Nations brass to disappear for a week in the country. It was still less simple for one of the bigwigs to walk out for a month, for business was always pressing, and generally critical.

No one set off on a junket of 33 lightyears unless it was pretty damned important.

Mavor thought Arcturus III was that important.

Since he was his own boss, with a twenty-year tenure that nothing less than outright impeachment could shake, he got away with it by keeping his mouth shut until the last minute, and then leaving red-faced Karl Hauser, his chief legal expert, to do his explaining for him.

He lined up a UN space liner over which he had jurisdiction, and did some backstage red-tape cutting to clear it–for use. While the ship's navigation officers were computing a faster-than-light course to Arcturus III, he found out what he could about Edward Simpson, the anthropologist already in the field.

Simpson's official photograph showed a lean, strong face, somewhat lantern-jawed, with dark hair and eyes. It was a rather ordinary face in the sense that it approached the cultural ideal of what a face should be; it would have suited any one of a host of moderately well-known tri-di actors, but it was not striking enough to stick in your mind.

How can you sum up a face in words?

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Mavor tagged it as determined and a trifle cynical, and turned to more revealing sources of information.

Simpson had majored in paleontology as an undergraduate at Harvard, and then switched to anthropology for his Ph.D. at the University of Michigan. His academic record tended to be spotty — he had done extremely well in courses that interested him, and just enough to pass in required work that hadn't caught his fancy. He'd done a fairly interesting dissertation on the prehistoric relationships between the southeastern United States and the Valley of Mexico, and published a solid ethnographic account of an agricultural group on Capella II.

Capable, then, if no ball of fire.

He'd grown up in Maine, where his father was a guide in the game preserves along the Canadian border. He'd married a local girl in Patten, and they had one son.

He was thirty-two years old.

Anything odd?

Anything revealing?

Well, he'd once gotten into warmish water by stating publicly that the UN was run by a collection of windbags, but that was the extent of his subversion, if such it could be termed.

Edward Simpson was either an extremely ordinary young man, or he had a talent for keeping his eccentricities to himself. In any event, he was not likely to have gone off half-cocked.

He knew what he was doing.

Mavor spent a day at home saying goodbye to his wife, Sue, who by this time was resigned to the periodic vanishings of her husband. Sue was even-tempered and not overly imaginative; Mavor had often doubted whether any other woman would have put up with him.

The space liner lifted on schedule.

Mavor looked into the viewscreen, and out across the star-blazed midnight that was the sea between the worlds. He saw splendor and loneliness, and the challenge of a universe in which man was but one tiny mystery in a darkness that had no ending.

The ship faded into the gray of hyperspace.

It was September 1, 2044.

The third planet of Arcturus was a green world, warmed by a reddish sun.

After contacting Simpson by radio from the liner, Mavor boarded a landing launch. The gray sphere drifted down out of the great night into a blue sky dotted with white clouds. It came to rest as lightly as a soap bubble on the target area. Mavor got out and the sphere floated up toward the sun, and was gone.

He was alone.

He stood by a small crystal-clear spring that chuckled out from under clean brown rocks. Around him a field of nodding grasses murmured in a fresh, cool breeze. To the east he

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could see blue mountains wrapped in shadows, and from the south he caught the hint of salt from the sea.

The air was a trifle richer in oxygen than that of Earth, but otherwise identical except for a few trace elements. It had a tang and a sparkle to it. You never really knew fresh air, Mavor thought, until you breathed on a planet that had never known heavy industries, where the internal combustion engine was fifty thousand years away, and smoke only a sweet tendril over a campfire. . . .

He stood still, waiting.

He showed no outward sign of nervousness. He didn't smoke, fidget, or pace.

He waited.

And yet he *was* nervous, and was candid enough with himself to admit it. Partly, it was just the excitement of a new world, a new sky, a new frontier. He had seen many new planets, but he had never gotten to them.

Every world was a miracle, if your eyes were good enough.

And Arcturus III was more than that. It was a mystery and a challenge and a threat.

It was trouble.

Here was a culture that lived by hunting wild animals and gathering roots and berries in the forest — the simplest of all economies. And yet, here was a culture ruled by priest-kings, who had a power of life and death over their people.

Remarkable?

The word was impossible.

You don't get dense populations and permanent settlements when you get your food by hunting for it, except under the most atypical conditions. If the population of New York had to eat by hunting deer and rabbits, most of the people would starve in nothing flat. If you hunt, you can't park in one place and wait for the game to jump into your pot — you have to go after it.

Most hunting peoples lived in small bands of perhaps one hundred men, women, and children. There were no sharply defined social classes, and certainly no kings. You've got to have surplus food to support non-producing specialists, and famine is a constant threat when you hunt for life. At the most, you might find a shaman or two, and a vaguely defined headman without any formal authority.

No chiefs, generally.

Kings?

Priests?

Vast ceremonial centers?

About as likely as a snake running a digital computer.

The cool breeze sighed through the tall grasses. Mavor waited.

The world of Arcturus III didn't play by the rules, and that meant danger. Simpson had stumbled across something that looked very much like a big fat monkey wrench in the gears. It wasn't the first time it had happened, of course — people had a nasty habit of being unpredictable occasionally.

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But this time —

"Mavor! Are you there?" The call came from the south, still faint with distance.

"At the spring, Simpson!" Mavor yelled.

A small cloud blotted out the sun, and the wind had a cold edge to it.

Mavor stood quietly, and waited.

Edward Simpson parted the tall grass and stepped forward.

Superficially, he looked like his picture; his features were regular, dominated by a stubborn jaw. He was thinner than Mavor expected, and more nervous. His dark eyes seemed only half-open, but he didn't appear sleepy by any means.

Wary.

The word popped into Mavor's mind, and stayed there.

The two men shook hands.

"I didn't expect a visit from the big boss himself," Simpson said rapidly. "Lucky I keep my radio on my wrist or I might have missed your call. What brings you to Arcturus III?"

"A spaceship, generally," Mavor said.

"I meant —"

"Never mind, Ed. Just a speech defect of mine. Looks like you hit the jackpot around here, and I kind of thought I'd wander out and help you count the quarters. Where are they?"

"How much time have you got?"

"Enough."

"Well, the Lkklah — that's what they call themselves — live south of here, most of them. Lkklah means 'people,' of course —"

"Toward the sea?"

"Generally, yes." Simpson offered Mavor a cigarette; when Mavor shook his head Simpson took one himself and returned the pack to his pocket.

"How many of them are there?"

"At least thirty thousand, if my census is accurate. That doesn't count the other tribes around here."

"There are some people who don't have this hotshot culture on the hunting base, then?"

"That's right. It isn't planetwide; I don't know the full extent of it yet."

"Fair enough. Let's take a gander at 'em."

"They move around a lot, Mr. Mavor —"

"You mean those huge ceremonial centers have got wheels on them?" Mavor surveyed the anthropologist with bland green eyes.

Simpson laughed. "I don't think so. But most of the people are scattered in hunting groups, and they're a little shy of strangers."

"I see. Your report mentioned resident officials in the big centers, I believe. Are they out to lunch?"

Simpson threw one cigarette into the spring and lit another. "They go on pilgrimages; I haven't got the exact cycle worked out yet. They'll be in one center or another, but I'd hate to take you on a long wild goose chase."

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"That *would* raise certain problems," Mavor admitted.

Simpson stared at him, trying to find some sort of an expression to read. He couldn't find one. He started to say something, then contented himself with a shrug.

"Let's go," Mavor said.

Simpson turned and led the way through the grass.

He set a fast pace, heading south.

Norman Mavor smiled, just a little, and followed him toward the distant sea.

Evening flowed down the salt-wind from the ocean, and delicate rose-tinted clouds hung on the western horizon. Then the sun was gone, and the night turned the world into a shadow.

There was no moon, but the starlight was a silver radiance in the sky.

It was cold, and Mavor jammed his hands into his pockets to keep them warm.

Neither man spoke.

The croaking of frogs and the persistent, irritating whine of some invisible animal blended in with the shuffle of their footsteps.

There was no other sound.

The terrain beneath their feet became rocky and a thorny vegetation pushed out the grass. Then the ground softened and they heard the sibilant glide of water. They came to a good-sized river, black with silver flecks under the stars, and followed a path that wound along its banks.

It was almost morning when they saw it.

In spite of himself, Mavor stopped short and caught his breath.

There, framed by the dark fence of the vegetation and frozen in the pale light of dawn, was magic. No man with an ounce of poetry in his soul could have seen it merely as a "ceremonial center."

Here was a hall where the gods might dance, and spirits sigh down the wind.

You thought at once of pyramids, but that was force of habit. The structures — there four of them — were square and massive, like blocks of basalt ripped from the depths of a world. They were terraced, with rock stairways cut into their sides.

How big were they?

Mavor reined in his imagination and estimated: sixty feet high, at least, and perhaps eighty feet on a side. And there were smaller structures on top of them — temples of some kind, beyond a doubt.

There were courtyards, altars, market squares.

The place was deserted, but the silence that hung over it was not the silence of centuries.

The place was *used*.

"Well?" asked Simpson, not without an edge of malice. His voice was as startling as a rifle shot in the stillness.

"It's magnificent," Mavor said quietly. Then: "Anyone home?"

"I don't think so. We'll look —

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these places aren't booby-trapped."

They walked through the courtyards, and peered into the buildings. They were pitch black inside, but a match showed the extent of the rooms. They were amazingly small considering the size of the exteriors; the construction was impressive, but not overly efficient.

They saw no one, and heard nothing.

"Gone to the World Series," Mavor commented.

"They're elusive, sometimes. They may be back here today, or not for months."

"I'll leave my card. I still want to see the people who built this place, Ed."

"How about some sack-time first?" Simpson asked, yawning. "It's comfortable inside the squares, if you don't mind rock mattresses."

"I don't mind," Mavor said.

They ducked inside one of the entrances and stretched out on the floor. Mavor was asleep in seconds, but whenever Simpson stirred Mavor's green eyes opened, and waited.

They slept six hours. Mavor would have preferred to breakfast on synthetics, but Simpson insisted on shooting a deerlike animal in the brush and broiling up some steaks.

The food was worth the extra wait.

It was afternoon before they left the ceremonial center and struck out along the river path, heading south. They did not see a single human being. Mavor did notice that the river was full of fish; they looked like salmon or trout leaping in the rapids. He filed that fact away for future reference.

There was a glazing sunset, and then a growing chill as evening faded into night.

There were still no people.

Mavor didn't complain. He walked along behind Simpson, who had run out of cigarettes and was getting more nervous by the minute. Mavor was tired, but he was ready to walk around the whole damned planet if necessary.

At the Earthly equivalent of three o'clock in the morning, Simpson stopped.

Mavor waited.

"I'll try a signal," Simpson said.

It's about time, Mavor thought, trying to ignore his swollen feet.

Simpson let out a long, moderately blood-curdling yell, and followed it with three short yips.

"Thank you, Tarzan of the Apes," complimented Mavor.

In seconds, there was an answer.

One long cry, three shorter ones.

About half a mile away, Mavor judged.

"Let's go," Simpson said.

They went.

It took them almost an hour, scrambling over rocks and getting their clothes ripped by thorns.

The camp lay before them, ghostlike in the foggy gray of early morning. It was little more than a low

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fire and a circle of crude lean-tos — a sleeping place that a month's winds and rains would erase from the face of the planet.

There were three dogs, all yelping.

Mavor counted seventeen people, most of them near-naked, but with skin cloaks against the cold. No tailored clothing, then. He saw some spears and dart-throwers, but no bows.

It looked like an extended family group, and it probably was.

Simpson spoke to one old man in a native language; Mavor couldn't get a word of it, of course, but he listened attentively. Learning native languages was no picnic in the best of circumstances, and out of the question for an official who had to keep tabs on many cultures, on many worlds.

The old man was delighted to see them. He laughed and clapped his hands together. He pulled them over to the fire and insisted that they eat some meat — which wasn't bad — and a kind of cold wild vegetable paste, which would have made the proverbial Duncan Hines beat a hasty retreat with all guns blazing.

The four women kept to themselves, although the younger girls were friendly enough. The men and boys swarmed around them, all chattering a mile a minute, and it was difficult to concentrate on anything.

Mavor kept his eyes open, however, and he took notes.

The day passed rapidly. Both Mavor and Simpson were on the weary side by evening, but the natives were hell-bent on hospitality. The men had snared an animal the size of a buffalo during the afternoon, and that was a fine excuse for a feast.

Mavor and Simpson pitched in and helped with the fire, much to the amusement of the women.

It developed that half-raw kidneys were considered the real delights here, and the visitors choked them down with a somewhat pale smile.

There was singing — a monotonous chanting of the same syllables over and over again, to the tick-tick-tick of bones tapped gently against two flat rocks. It wasn't pretty, but it was hypnotic.

And, somehow, it was sad.

Late that night, when the orange fires were low and the shadows were soft and close, Simpson leaned over to Mavor. The natives were off on a story-telling binge, most of which was too rough linguistically even for Simpson.

Simpson's usually sleepy eyes were open wide now, and alert in the firelight.

"These people have a saying," he whispered.

Mavor waited.

"They say that in the spring the winds blow from the south, and the trees and flowers and people will live forever. But when autumn comes the north wind blows; the leaves turn brown and fall, and the people

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know that they too must die. Listen!"

A night wind sighed through the brush and twisted the flickering flames.

Even here, so close to the sea, the wind came out of the north, and it was cold.

"Goodnight," Simpson said, and stretched out on the ground and closed his eyes.

Mavor sat silently, listening to the voices and the wind.

It was late when he slept.

In the morning, after a stomach-searing breakfast, Mavor turned to Simpson.

"I've got news for you," he said.

"Well?"

"I may not be an anthropologist, Ed, but I wasn't born yesterday, either. These people are not the Lkklah you were telling me about. They are just what they seem to be — a band of semi-nomadic hunters. I don't know who they are, and I don't care. They didn't build those ceremonial centers any more than I did."

Simpson eyed him narrowly, but said nothing.

"I don't mind games, son," Mavor said. "If you want to walk me for a hundred years, that's your business. But I'm going to see these Lkklah of yours before I leave this planet. Why don't you stop being so damned clever and get it over with?"

Simpson hesitated, shrugged, and said something to the native headman. Then, without a word, he walked away into the brush, heading back toward the river.

Mavor tagged along after him, and did not look back.

They reached the sparkling river and continued south along the path. Simpson set a killing pace, but Mavor didn't complain. He just watched the river, and noted the fish leaping in the shallows.

Within four hours they hit a stand of sweet-smelling trees that looked like cedars. The smell of salt was strong in the heavy air, and Mavor thought he could hear the sea.

The path through the trees climbed steeply, and then they rounded a turn and the land dropped off sharply before them. The view was excellent, and Mavor saw all he needed to see.

He stopped.

Below them was the sea, almost black beneath a cold gray sky. Between the sea and the rocky cliff they stood on was a stretch of timber perhaps a quarter of a mile wide.

The village was in the trees.

This time it was no simple hunting camp. There were solid plank houses, and lots of them. There were hundreds of people visible, all of them well-dressed in tailored clothing. There were large, graceful seagoing canoes drawn up along the beach.

The houses extended along the shore as far as the eye could see. Thousands of people could have

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been taken care of without any strain at all.

There were no cultivated fields that Mavor could spot.

But there were rivers.

He counted ten of them from where he stood, winding through the cliffs and emptying into the sea.

He turned to Simpson.

"These are the Lkklah?"

"Some of them. Yes."

"These are the people who built the ceremonial centers back yonder?"

"Yes."

Mavor studied the younger man with his cool green eyes. "Maybe you'd like to sit down," he said.

"You're not going into the village, after coming all this way?"

"No need for that, Ed."

A vein began throbbing insistently in Simpson's forehead.

"Say what you've got to say, Mavor."

"Maybe you'd rather tell me."

"Tell you what?"

"Oh hell, man." Mavor almost seemed irritated, but recovered himself. He sat down on a boulder, his unhandsome face lined and tired.

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"Okay, Ed." Mavor clasped his hands and rested his chin on his thumbs. "We'll put it in teensy-weensy little words so there'll be no mistake. *Don't you know it's a serious crime to fake your data?*"

The scent of the trees was fresh and clean around them, and the beat of the sea was the pulse of unhurried centuries.

But now ugliness was between them on the cliff.

The silence stretched taut.

For a long minute, Mavor thought that Simpson was going to try to brazen it out, even now. But the younger man suddenly slumped and turned his back.

The battle was over.

"How'd you know?" Simpson asked, his voice muffled.

"It's my job to know, Ed. You were too vague with the crucial details in your report. Any time a miracle crosses my desk, pal, I want photographs, statistics, and an analysis somewhat above the sophomoric level."

Simpson turned, his eyes narrowed. "I wasn't that crude. I said there were complex ceremonial centers, and there were. I said these people had no agriculture, and they don't."

"Bunk," Mavor said bluntly. "You know as well as I do that it isn't the simple technological level that's important — it's the total ecological situation. If you've got plenty of food, and it's reliable, it doesn't make a damn bit of difference where you got it from. If you've got the food, you get the population. If you get the population, a complex social structure is possible — though not inevitable. If your social organization is complex enough, you get specialists freed from food production — and you can build your

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temples, carve your totem poles, and generally raise hell."

"Thanks for the lecture."

"You're welcome. Look, son, the old Indians on the Northwest Coast of North America had exactly the same deal you've got here. No agriculture, but streams chock-full of salmon — and just about the most complex prehistoric culture north of Mexico. Lots of the Plains Indians had no agriculture, but they had horses, and they had the bison."

"Yeah, yeah. I know all that."

"Good. That means you knew what you were doing. You didn't just make a mistake — you lied in your teeth."

Simpson clenched his fists, but didn't move.

"You were sent to Arcturus III to survey the culture here. It's my job to allocate land for Earth colonies on other planets like this one. I depend on the reports you guys send in. So what do you do? You stumble over this interesting deal where there's a pretty elaborate culture based on a river network that's choked with fish. They go and build some impressive squares out in the brush. It's great stuff, but there's nothing mysterious about it, and you know it. Just the same, you concoct this cock-and-bull story about the Wisdom of the Ancients and advise us to keep hands-off for a hundred years. You admit all this?"

Simpson shrugged.

"Okay, Ed. Now, I'm curious as hell. What in the devil did you think you were doing — and *why* did you do it?"

Simpson took a deep breath. "You wouldn't understand — not unless you knew the Lkklah. If you'd come with me down into the village —"

"I don't *want* to know the Lkklah — and I don't want to wind up in a stewpot, either."

The look in Simpson's eyes now was neither regret nor fear.

It was hate.

"I thought I was getting a hundred years of peace for some people I liked," he said evenly. "I did it to do them a favor, and if you don't like it I don't give a damn."

Mavor got up, his green eyes narrowed with anger. "You did it to do them a *favor*," he repeated. "You simple-minded jackass."

Simpson started for him.

Mavor stood up straight, a trace of a smile on his lips. He looked Simpson right in the eye and waited.

Simpson stopped.

"It's too late now," Simpson said wearily. "You'll get your lousy planet no matter what I do."

"Exactly," Mavor said.

Mavor punched the stud on his wrist radio which threw a beam to the satellite transmitter and then to the waiting space liner. The landing sphere would pick him up where it had set him down.

"What happens now?" Simpson said. "Do I go back in the brig on bread and water?"

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"You do your job," Mavor said shortly. "I'll make it back to the spring."

Simpson frowned. "You don't mean —"

"Don't tell me what I mean and what I don't mean. You're an anthropologist and you were hauled out here at considerable expense to do a job: establish the land-use patterns of the highest culture on Arcturus III. Do your job, and this time do it right. I'll decide what to do about you when I see what your fieldwork looks like — and this time let's have some facts."

"I'm not sure I care to do your dirty work for you," Simpson said. "These people are my friends —"

"Do it or go to jail," Mavor said.

The older man turned and started back along the trail, the north wind in his face. It was a long way back to the pickup point, and he wasted no time on backward glances.

Edward Simpson stood for almost an hour where he was, facing the sea.

There were tears in his eyes.

"The bastard," he said, over and over again. "The dirty, blind, self-righteous bastard."

Then, very slowly, he started down toward the plank houses and the laughter of the people who had been his friends.

The trip from Arcturus III to Earth was uneventful.

On November 21, 2044, Norman Mavor was back in his office. His formal blue suit was neatly pressed, his straight gray hair faultlessly combed. His green eyes were calm and patient.

He looked a little older; that was the only change.

"Well, Basil," he said to the cross-legged chimpanzee, "here we go again."

He flipped a switch.

"Send in Bill Shackelford," he said, and smiled a little.

He waited.

Shackelford got there in ten minutes flat. He was smoking a cigar when he came in, and he had evidently fortified himself with a shot of bottled courage.

"I guess this is where I get the old heave-ho," Shackelford said. He looked like he hadn't been sleeping any too well.

"I considered it," Mavor said.

Shackelford carefully took the cigar out of his mouth. "Can me then, Mr. Mavor. I made a mistake, I admit that. But I'm not doing any crawling."

Mavor raised his eyebrows. "You've already heard about Arcturus III, I take it?"

"Word gets around."

Mavor nodded. "Unfortunate business, Bill. But Simpson just made an honest mistake; it could have happened to anyone. I don't fire people for making mistakes, Bill."

"You said —"

"I said I had considered firing you. I didn't say what for."

"Are you asking me a riddle?"

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"Hardly." Mavor tilted his chair back. "I want you to take charge of working up the new data from Arcturus III; we've got about two years before the hearing. I want you to make absolutely certain those natives don't get one inch more territory than they're entitled to under the law. Will you do it?"

Shackelford sat down. He looked blankly at his cigar, then slipped it into the disposer.

"It's a dirty job," he said finally.

"I'm glad you think so."

"You mean I'm not fired?"

"Not yet." Mavor reached into a desk drawer and pulled out the morning's New York *Times*, folded to the editorial page. "Did you see where I got my name in the paper again?"

"I saw," Shackelford said, cautiously.

"The usual rave notice," Mavor observed. He cleared his throat. "*Norman Mavor, Integrator of Interstellar Affairs, returned yesterday from another junket, this time to Arcturus III. He announced with evident pride that he had managed to obtain legal rights to yet another planet for colonization. This man, whose job it is to protect the rights of extraterrestrial natives, has shown a consistent disregard for the very natives he is sworn to support. It seems safe to say that no man on this planet has done more to rob native peoples of their homelands than Norman Mavor. . . .*"

"I read it," Shackelford said.

"And agreed, no doubt." Mavor put the paper away. "I think I should start a scrapbook."

"You *don't* like natives, do you?" Shackelford said, almost in spite of himself.

"Not particularly," Mavor admitted.

"And you want me to go over Arcturus III with a fine-toothed comb, to grab all we can get."

"Exactly."

"You know most of the planet will be occupied by simple hunting peoples. That means they won't have private ownership of land — only vague band territories, and a few water-holes. Even the Lkklah, from what I've heard, won't have much beyond a coastal strip and a few acres of bush."

"That's right. Legally, the people of Arcturus III don't own their world at all — they just own a few square miles of it. We *do* give them their hunting territories, and marginal safety zones as well. We keep out trespassers. Don't you think that's pretty generous?"

Shackelford began to get very red in the face. "I think it shows a colossal gall!" he said, his voice louder than he had intended. "What's the matter with you? What do you use instead of a heart — a cake of ice?"

Mavor actually smiled. "Loyalty from one's subordinates is always touching," he said.

Shackelford got up and began waving his arms. "You don't have to fire me, Mavor. I quit!"

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"Never mind," Mavor said. "Sit down."

Shackelford looked into the green eyes, hesitated, and sat down.

Mavor sized his man up, and wondered.

Was Bill ready?

Or did he need more time, like Simpson?

He looked down at his desk, almost embarrassed. He found it hard to go on.

But he was no longer young, and he was tired.

"Bill," he said softly, "do you know why I almost fired you?"

Shackelford, uncertain what role he was playing, just shook his head numbly.

Mavor hunched forward, for once forgetting the neat press on his clothes. "You came busting in here a few months back with what you thought was a real ding-dong lulu, like the artists of Centaurus VI. You thought we really had something, and do you know what you said to me?"

Shackelford shook his head again.

"*These people aren't just a bunch of savages, Mr. Mavor — they're unique, they've done something nobody ever managed before.*"

Shackelford flushed. "I didn't mean —"

"Yes, you did. You meant that those people were exceptional, and entitled to special treatment. Not just a bunch of savages, as you so charmingly phrased it."

"Well —"

"Well, they *weren't* anything special. Most people aren't. They were just plain old dirty people. No telepaths, no human spaceships, no child supermen with wet diapers. Isn't that a crashing shame?"

"Look, you said you didn't even *like* natives. You've squeezed 'em out of every last square foot —"

"Oh, drop dead." Mavor rumpled his gray hair with his gnarled fingers. "I said I didn't like natives *particularly*. I don't. I'm just old-fashioned enough, just unsophisticated enough, so that I kind of admire human beings in general. I don't give a damn whether they're primitives or live in New York — or both. The odd notion that a man has to be some kind of freak before he's worth anything gives me a royal pain in the sacrum."

"But —"

"Listen, Junior," Mavor said. "This is the old inhuman monster talking, and he may gobble you alive if you don't pay attention. It's only been a few stinking hundred years since primitive peoples were thought of as animals, and hunted down with dogs. This whiz-bang technological culture of ours is still expanding — and if you think one starry-eyed gent can stop it with his mighty idealistic soul you've got rocks in your head. We've got laws now that give them *some* protection at least. Sure, I think they should be let alone to live as they please. We should keep out. Maybe we should have kept out of America, too, but

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we didn't. It may be news to you, Bill, but I am not the United Nations. I'm just a civil servant with a nasty job."

"You could get out —"

Mavor laughed. It was a strange sound. "Would it help those people out there if *you* had my job?" *Or Simpson,* he thought. *That trick of his would have been uncovered within five years — and then what would have become of the Lkklah?* "Suppose all the people here were positive you were cheating a little in *favor* of the aliens. That's the way they think of them, you know — as aliens. Believe me, it's better this way."

Shackelford stood up, visibly shaken. "But why don't you tell people? Why do you let them —"

Mavor jerked his thumb toward the door. "Run along," he said.

Shackelford left.

Norman Mavor was very tired.

He shook a finger at the picture of the chimpanzee on his desk. "Basil," he said, "you're a fraud. Beneath that hairy exterior there beats a heart of purest gold."

He hated the lectures; they were the toughest part.

"Hooray for me," he whispered, and wondered.

Two years later, in December, they held the hearings concerning Arcturus III.

The copter with NORMAN MAVOR discreetly lettered on the cabin sides floated down through a flurry of snow and landed on the roof of the Adjudication Building. Mavor and Karl Hauser, his balding legal expert, climbed out.

The wind was cold behind the driven snow.

"When autumn comes the north wind blows," Mavor said. "The leaves turn brown and fall, and the people know that they too must die. . . ."

"What the hell is that, old man?"

"Some poetry I heard once. Nothing important. Let's go."

They rode the private elevator down, and then walked along the spotless corridor. Mavor's green suit was crisply pressed, and not a hair on his head was out of place. He walked erect, and his deep green eyes looked neither to the right nor to the left.

"I figure we can argue Old Fishface out of a quarter of the planet," Karl said jubilantly. "Not bad."

"Oh, we're hot stuff," Mavor said.

Some people recognized him, and there were the usual whispered catcalls.

Mavor gave no sign that he had heard.

The heavy glass doors of the hearing room hissed open.

The Colonial Development Committee was waiting.

Together, their briefcases under their arms, Mavor and Karl Hauser walked into the chamber.

"Give 'em hell," Karl Hauser whispered.

"I'll do my best," said Mavor.

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The Science Screen

by CHARLES BEAUMONT

THE PICKINGS ARE LEAN INDEED THIS quarter, but indications are that this is only the column before the storm. Hollywood appears to have reappraised either the public or its own approach to science fiction, for all studios have announced plans for bigger, better, and different s.f. films, with the emphasis on different. Of course, this may be so much wishful thinking on the part of the blatherskites in the publicity departments, but a glance at the properties in various stages of preparation inclines one toward optimism. At Universal-International, for instance, Richard Matheson's THE INCREDIBLE SHRINKING MAN (to be published by Gold Medal on the heels of the picture's release) is receiving what may be termed Star Treatment: a full-scale budget, top-of-the-bill quality, and important players. The story is very definitely science fiction, but it will not be so labeled in any of the advertising; and this is, to my mind, a significant step forward. The public has come to equate the term with subliterate trash (all thanks to the idiocies perpetrated by Hollywood in the past four or five years) and its presence in connection with any motion picture, however excellent, is probably the kiss of death. If 20,000 LEAGUES UNDER THE SEA had carried the identification forthrightly, perhaps this wouldn't be so; but it did not, and it is. And is the loss so great, actually? I don't believe so. I believe, instead, that we stand to gain immeasurably; that this decision may very well open the door wide for a return to better days. If the only way we are going to get good science fiction pictures is to deny that they are science fiction, then hadn't we best turn traitor at once? (Together, now: *Down with s.f.!*)

The U-I Generals have set another precedent, by the way, and it is good news to readers and authors; particularly to authors. For the first time in the history of motion pictures, a studio has hired a science fiction writer to script his own book. Matheson, well known to F&SF followers as one of the best practitioners in the field, is presently finishing up the screenplay based on his novel; and if they do not turn it over to a "script doctor," he will be the first to see his own creation solo all the way through. It is an important experiment and

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one which a lot of people will be watching carefully. For there is a legend in Hollywood, to the effect: There is no one less equipped to turn a novel into a movie than that novel's author. The theory is interesting. It is predicated on the notion that screen-writing and fiction-writing are two separate and distinct mediums, each calling for a special set of talents. A man who is capable of creating firstrate films, states the theory, may be unable to crack the lowliest pulp; conversely, a Nobel Prizewinner may not have the foggiest idea of what it takes to make a good motion picture. Unfortunately, this is not so absurd as it sounds. At one studio, nameless here and forevermore, the self-styled "kept hacks" are still buttering their egos with the story of a world-famous Author who was hired to confect a screenplay about one of his acclaimed short stories. This Author, who once wrote outstanding s.f. but moves today in rather more mystic circles, was accorded the Respect Due Him. "Now, listen, you guys," the chief producer was supposed to have snarled to his stable of hacks, "this here is a real honest-to-God *Author*. He writes books and stories, see? So I don't want no horsing around. And everybody wears ties while he's here!" The poor Author was given one of the plush bungalows usually occupied by visiting royalty. He was also given two dozen sharpened pencils, the best secretary in the joint, and five reams of good paper. He was never called in for story conferences. His bosses were too awed or embarrassed to check on his progress — after all, hadn't he been listed right along with George Bernard Shaw as one of the greatest prose stylists of our time? He was left strictly alone, and in five weeks he brought in the finished treatment. The producers read it. Their jaws fell. They blinked. As one old-timer put it: "Man, you wouldn't believe it! This was the worst piece of tripe anybody had ever seen. Here they paid this guy a fortune and gave him the old red carpet treatment, and it turns out he hadn't so much as *seen* a movie for ten years!"

The Author was eased out very diplomatically, but with great firmness. His memories of the experience are cloudy and indistinct, it's said. But to the people who hired him, there is no confusion. To them it was simply a dreadful mistake from beginning to end, and one they wouldn't repeat soon. They scrapped the treatment, put one of their "physicians" on it and came up with a nice, bad, money-making picture. And there have been enough similar incidents to give the theory some justification.

On the other hand, it can certainly be argued that no one *knows* more about a book than the book's author, and that he ought to be hired at least for the first draft. In the case of writers who are, in Hollywood parlance, "out there" (that is,

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too intellectual — or limited — to think visually) it would seem a simple measure to team them with others who are versed in motion picture technique. That way, both fronts would be covered.

For myself, I am not convinced that the mediums are that disparate. In my position as script analyst for a motion picture studio, I have had an opportunity to read literally hundreds of screenplays. I have just read Richard Matheson's screenplay; and it is as fine, and professionally polished, a job of craftsmanship as anyone could reasonably ask. In fact, if it is followed, I think we may look forward to one of the best science fiction pictures ever made.

It makes one wonder how such films as THE THING (*Who Goes There?*) or THIS ISLAND EARTH or THE TWONKY might have turned out if the original authors (Campbell, Jones and the Kuttners) had been allowed to do the scripts.

Against all advice, and my better judgment, I went to see KING DINOSAUR, (Lippert), and am still somewhat alarmed at the fun I had. I recommend it for one excellent reason: It is not only the worst s.f. picture ever made (and that includes CONQUEST OF SPACE, RED PLANET MARS, and ROBOT MONSTER), but also without question the worst picture of any sort ever made, in all respects. A blessed veil of forgetfulness has spared me any specific memories, except an absolutely hilarious battle between a Gila monster and a baby alligator. The Gila monster is, of course, supposed to be the Dinosaur. What the baby alligator is supposed to be, I couldn't say. (Two gentlemen named Al Zimbalist and Bert I. Gordon collaborated, if that is the word, on the story; Bert I. Gordon directed.)

TARANTULA! (Universal-International) is rousing good fun, and makes no effort to disguise itself as anything but what it is: a juvenile spook show — only with a giant spider instead of a bogeyman. The story is right off the cob, but necessarily so, and it does not impede the general merriment. Scientists working in the desert have developed a nutrient with which they inject various animals — and the tarantula of course — causing fantastic growth in a matter of days. In the natural course of events, the spider escapes into the desert, and we're off to the chases. So that the special effects department is kept hopping, we have a sub-plot wherein two of the scientists inject themselves with the nutrient, with less than happy results. The spider is less repellent than its smaller kin, oddly, but there are many nice, horrible moments, and the whole thing adds up to an enjoyable way to kill an hour or so. Robert M. Fresco and Martin Berkeley wrote it, Jack Arnold (who is to do THE INCREDIBLE SHRINKING MAN) directed it. John Agar and Mara Corday are decorative, while Leo

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G. Carroll (TV's Topper) supplies the only real acting. He is quite good, and obviously had a fine time.

In the case of ULYSSES (Ponti-de Laurentiis) we have so many culprits that it is impossible to fix the blame on anyone in particular. The producers, Dino de Laurentiis and Carlo Ponti, apparently believe that quantity equals quality, and so they hired as many screenwriters as they could get their hands on. Those who received credit (by no means an accurate guide to the number who actually worked on the script) are listed in alphabetical order; Franco Brusati, Mario Camerini, Ennio de Concini, Hugh Gray, Ben Hecht, Ivo Perilli, and Irwin Shaw. I am told that the man responsible for the final dialogue is nowhere mentioned, but if true this is just as well for him, because the picture is exactly what you'd expect with all those thumbs in the pie. Based on one of the most exciting of all fantasy classics, it manages to be dull, obscure, pretentious, and utterly foolish. The first sin is, I think, the least forgivable. How anyone could make a dull film from THE ODYSSEY is beyond imagination, but it has been done: the entire business is a thumping bore. Ulysses himself emerges less a hero than a rascally soldier of fortune, cut from the same hunk of cheese as Flash Gordon and Steve Canyon, only not quite so virtuous as either, and considerably less bright. A miracle of miscasting put Kirk Douglas in the role, and though he looks the part to an eyelash, he plays it as if he had just wandered in from the set of a prize-fighting movie. He is the only one, besides Anthony Quinn, whose speeches are not dubbed in; but he gives if anything an even stranger effect. Ulysses here speaks with a Bronx dialect, while the others are from the Old Vic. As Penelope and Circe, Silvana Mangano demonstrates that versatility is not one of her accomplishments. She's pretty enough to look at, but expressionless throughout. Anthony Quinn slips in and out so fast you don't notice him. It is all very depressing, as, say, the joined chapters of a Superman serial would be depressing.

Progress Report: Universal-International will soon have a trio of s.f. thrillers ready for our sore eyes: THE HIDDEN VALLEY (scripted by Laszlo Gorog), THE DEADLY MANTIS (assigned to Martin Berkeley), and, as predicted, another Gill-Man epic (already "in the can"). From Allied Artists we may expect THEY COME FROM ANOTHER WORLD (new title for Jack Finney's THE BODY SNATCHERS; still not ready for review because of last-minute revisions).

U-I producer Gordon Kay has hired this reviewer to write THE MAN WHO COULD NOT DIE, a modern treatment of the immortality theme; strictly science fiction . . . but don't let it get around. More on this next issue.

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You've encountered the British writer P. M. Hubbard in F&SF as a poet (Nobody Hunts Witches, *May, 1955*), *a humorist* (Manuscript Found in a Vacuum, *August, 1953*) *and a writer of brief but hauntingly suggestive science fiction sketches* (Botany Bay, *February, 1955*). *It's in this last vein that he returns to give us yet another view of our possible future descendants.*

Lion

by P. M. HUBBARD

DOWN CLOSER TO THE RIVER, WHERE the floods scoured the broken stones, the trees could not mature; and here the oak-woods gave way to a scrub-jungle of birch and alder. Further out still, just above the mud-flats, there was a belt of tamarisk.

The couple came out of the woods a little before sunset, following the trail zig-zag towards the water. They walked quick and short, with shoulders a bit rounded and hands swinging in front. They were bundled in homespun, well woven but uniformly drab. The only color was in the hair, a full and tremendous copper, exquisitely plaited and coiled, the woman's on top of her head and the man's about his shoulders. The sun, striking low across the thickets, caught them as they moved to and fro. In the dun landscape the swinging copper heads were visible half a mile off.

They slowed down as the path turned in towards the lion, and ten yards from it they stopped altogether. Then the woman went on, holding herself erect and walking carefully in the worn foot-holes. She walked ten measured paces and then, stooping, touched with her long fingers the rounded corner of the podium. She said, "Good morning, Lion." Then she walked ten paces outwards in the foot-holes and waited for the man. The lion was much weather-worn but still recognizable. Cocked up at an angle of thirty degrees by the tilting of his pedestal, he looked haughtily down his nose at the sky. "Good morning, Lion," said the man, and stepped carefully after his wife.

They hurried on, full of the decorous glee of a duty performed. "I spoke to George," the man said, "about what you were saying. About the ancients. He laughed."

She made a show of dismay, but did not stop. "He would," she said

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over her shoulder. "He doesn't think, George doesn't. It must be right."

"Said it was an excuse. All this talk of occult powers because they were cleverer than we are."

"You didn't mention Lion, did you?"

"No, no, of course not. George is very conventional. But the wall and all the rest of it. He wouldn't have it. They could think he kept on saying; the same as us, measuring and counting, but much better."

She stopped and he came alongside her. The ground dipped suddenly here, and the huge stone parapet, starting horizontal out of the green slope, reached straight twenty yards towards the sunset. The top was mossy and indeterminate, but under the dripstone the edge ran through unbroken at a perfect ninety degrees. She leant across it, hooking her fingers under the backward edge. The sun was down now, and the copper coils looked dark under the rose-pink sky. The wind blew steadily up river, but not a hair was out of place.

She said, "Actually, Lion isn't as important as this. I can imagine myself, just about, making Lion, only don't say I said so. It's only bigger and better than what we do make. And much harder, of course. But given time, fabulous time, and skill and enough metal — do you think it's a very shocking suggestion?"

He smiled a little indulgently and patted her arm. "You won't shock me," he said. "I won't answer for George."

"But the point is, I don't believe they were just stronger and cleverer. They didn't need fabulous time. They knew something we don't or had something we haven't. I don't know what it was, but I know what they did with it. They knew before they got there, at a distance. They had to, or they couldn't have done this." The dark coils of hair stirred and shifted as her brow wrinkled with the effort to understand. Her fingers gripped the straight edge of stone, and felt along it, and gripped again.

He touched her arm. He said, "I think that's a bit pessimistic. We shall learn. We are learning fast — you know that. Give us time, and we shall do all they did. As for Lion, it still takes a bit more explaining than you're prepared to admit. You wouldn't be without it, you know."

"Lion's all right if I'm wrong," she said. "It's all right even if I stop thinking. But if I'm right — or when I think I'm right — Lion's no good to me at all."

"Stop thinking, then," he said, "just for the moment, anyway. We've got work to do, and thinking won't get us through the winter. Keep it for the times you can't sleep. That's a good time to think."

He set off down the path. "Not that I see what good your thinking's going to do," he said.

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"I know. I know that myself. What they had could just come, but you couldn't think it up. Sometimes when I dream I am fairly certain I have it, but it doesn't make sense when I wake up. I can't remember even what happened — what it felt like. Only I'm sure I have had it in my dream."

The rushes took long to gather, and it was nearly dark when they came back with their bundles. Everything was silent under the steel-blue sky, and when she spoke it was almost a whisper. She said, "I'm afraid. I don't like this time. Too quiet."

"We're almost home," he said.

"Do you think it matters what I said about Lion? You're quite right. I wouldn't be without it really. Only I can't stop myself thinking. Do you think it matters?"

They stopped dead, heads bent, listening. The sound came from down river. He said, "Wings." He dropped his bundle and ran, his wife after him. They zig-zagged up the path, doubled forward, their hands outstretched, and flung themselves under the tilted granite. Dignified even in his upheaval, the lion pointed his weather-blunted nose at the sky as flight after flight went over, heading for the darkened woods upstream. Breathless with fear, the two crouched under him, their ears pricked under the copper coils of hair, their white and sightless eyes bent upon the ground.

It's Never Too Early!

The committee of the 14th World Science Fiction Convention, to be held in New York over Labor Day weekend (August 31-September 4), has not yet announced its specific plans: but I urge you to register now. This is New York's first chance to show what it can do since the first of all Conventions 17 years ago; and the more advance reservations the committee receives, the more confidently it can plan. Whatever the committee schedules, I think I can promise you the presence of such F&SF authors as Asimov, Bloch, Clingerman, de Camp and so on down the alphabet; and whatever the formal program may be, you're sure of that warmth of goodfellowship which flourishes so uniquely at Conventions. Send your $2 registration fee now to 14th World Science Fiction Convention, Box 272, Radio City Station, New York 19. — A.B.

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Even such specialists as Ralph Milne Farley and L. Sprague de Camp must, I think, yield to J. B. Priestley as the most intensive adapter of modern theories of Time. If you're lucky, you may find, in one of those rare shops which specialize in the best paperback books, Priestley's THREE TIME-PLAYS *(London: Pan, 1947), which includes three contrasting treatments of Time-themes:* DANGEROUS CORNER *(Split Time),* TIME AND THE CONWAYS *(Dunne's Serial Time) and* I HAVE BEEN HERE BEFORE *(Ouspensky's Circular Time), with an excellent brief note by the author on theatrical use of such theories. The earliest of these plays dates back to 1932, and Priestley has kept returning to the problem of Time ever since, most recently in the novel* THE MAGICIANS *(Harper, 1954) and the short stories collected as* THE OTHER PLACE *(Harper, 1955). Here is one of the most evocative of his tales, with its own new view of Time — the story of a couple of today's dissatisfied young people, a pair of "the resenters," who learn, in one strange night, that when you complain that life is "strictly low budget," life (and Time) may unexpectedly reply with a display of spacious dimensions and the enchantment of long vistas.*

Night Sequence

by J. B. PRIESTLEY

. . . AND THEN — THIS WAS THE PAY-off — he reversed so hard that they went into a ditch. It was a shallow ditch and they were in no danger. But the car would not budge, and the rear end of it, with all their luggage at the back, was well under water. With some difficulty, for the car was at a sharp angle and outside it was nothing but rain and darkness, they climbed out and scrambled on to the road.

"And now what?" Betty was shrill, not having recovered yet from her fright.

"Don't be a bloody fool. Why ask me?" Luke was angrier than ever. "You know all about it, don't you?"

They glared at one another through the dark and the curtain of rain between them. Idiotic, of course, but there you are. "If you hadn't got into such a foul temper when I told you that was the wrong turn," she cried, not far from tears,

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"you wouldn't have backed into that ditch."

"No doubt. But who wanted to come this way? What was the point? Just tell me that." He had been wet for some time, because the old canvas hood was far from being waterproof; but now the rain was running icily down his back. "No use blaming me now. Got a cigarette?"

"No, of course I haven't got a cigarette. Didn't I ask you to stop at that pub for some cigarettes — and you wouldn't?"

"Oh — for God's sake!" He stamped about in a meaningless fashion, only to realize that his shoes were full of water. He could feel it oozing between his toes. "We've had nothing to eat, nothing to drink. We're miles from anywhere. And now we can't even raise a cigarette between us."

"And whose fault is that?" she demanded.

"What the hell does it matter whose fault it is? Don't go on and on like an idiot." He could hear his voice reaching a high wobbling note, as it often did, to his disgust, when he was agitated. Why couldn't he be really tough and stay in the bass register? Why had he to be here with Betty? Why did she want to come this way? Why had he to miss the turn, reverse so savagely, land them in the ditch? Why — why — why? "We're only wasting time. The question is — what do we do now?"

"Well, that's what I was asking when you told me not to be a bloody fool — thank you very much." Betty really was crying now; it seemed even sillier than usual, seeing there was so much water about. She moved a little closer. "Can't you do anything about the car? Is it hopeless?"

"Of course it's hopeless."

"What about our bags?"

There was a time when it had made him feel proud and happy to be regarded by Betty as a kind of magician; now her helpless questioning only fed his disgust. "They're in the middle of that ditch and as far as I'm concerned that's where they're staying. If you want to try undoing those straps under water go on — try it. But I warn you that everything will be soaked. So forget 'em."

"Okay." She was the continuity girl now, not the appealing wife. "If we've had it, we've had it. Come on."

"Come on where?" he shouted angrily. The downpour was worse than ever, more like a cloudburst than ordinary autumn rain.

Betty stopped being the quiet capable continuity girl. "How do I know and what does it matter where? But we can't stand here all night, getting wetter and wetter, just screaming at each other like lunatics. We can find some sort of shelter, can't we?"

Luke admitted that they could try. It did not matter which way they went, for, as he had already announced, they were miles from

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anywhere. He was not sure what county they were in. Northampton, Bucks, Bedford? At the crossroads near-by, where she said he had taken the wrong turn, she moved to the right and he followed without protest. They went squelching along, through rain darkly drumming away; trudging and muttering like a pair of outcasts. Sometimes their shoulders bumped, but they left it at that, without any arm-taking or hand-holding, though they were young and had been married only three years and were not at the moment having affairs with anybody else. They might have been any two employees of the New Era Actuality Film Company, which did indeed still employ them, Luke as a director, Betty on scripts and continuity, after it had first brought them together. Stumbling on, cold now as well as wet, with his head well down, Luke thought of the job from which they were returning, the usual Documentary Short, this time on a big new cement works near Nottingham. A few nice shots, mostly long shots of the exteriors, but basically a corny job. He knew it, the unit boys knew it, and very soon the cement people and the public, if any, would know it.

"I see a light," Betty announced.

He came out of his sour reverie. "Where?" But then he saw it too. Well off the road, and rather dim. "Doesn't look promising."

"Neither does this filthy dark road," she snapped. "And I've had enough of it. At least they can tell us where we are — and let us use the 'phone if they have one."

"We might find something better round the corner." But he said this without conviction, just to raise an objection.

"Oh — don't be stupid. I'm half-drowned. There's some sort of drive there, I think."

While they were hesitating, the night turned into a black cascade, soaking them in a cold fury. Without another word, they turned in the drive at an irregular trot and splashed their way, head down and half blinded, towards the light. Luke arrived first between the two pillars, snapped on his lighter in the shelter there, and was thumping away at the massive old knocker when Betty joined him. They stood there shivering, still silent.

There was nothing remarkable, as they agreed afterwards, about the woman who opened the door: she was dumpy and elderly, dressed in black. They began explaining themselves and their plight and were still at it when they found themselves indoors and the woman, who had not spoken, was turning a key in the door, locking out the night and not them. She held a lamp up towards their faces, gave them another long look, muttered something they could not catch, and then, putting down the lamp, hurriedly left the hall, closing the door behind her. It was a square hall, not very large, sparsely furnished, with no suggestion of

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comfort and good cheer about it. Indeed, it was rather like an entrance to a museum.

"I hope she understood what we said," Betty muttered, wriggling a little in her discomfort. "And has gone to ask somebody what to do about us. My God — I feel like a drowned rat."

"You look like one," said Luke, without a smile.

"And what do you imagine you look like?" She was furious with him, turned away, and tried to do something with her hair, which might have been wet, dark string. The dripping old raincoat, streaked purple sweater and tweed skirt, muddy stockings, completed the picture. Luke stared at her.

"As a matter of fact you've been looking tatty all the week," he told her. "I wanted to mention it before, but hadn't time."

"You'd plenty of time to put down double gins with Bert and Mack. And you ought to see yourself. You haven't even bothered shaving today, though you've had oceans of time. Oh — I know the idea. Trying to look like the overworked director — the Hollywood touch."

"Oh — for Chrissake —"

"That's right," she said, still not looking at him. "Let's have the dialogue now. And start shouting. That's all we need to be turned out." She shook herself. "And I never felt so wet and miserable in my life."

"Go on, then, cry. Perhaps they'll let you stay and only turn me out." This was worse than usual; but he hated himself for suddenly hating her, then found himself hating her more for making him hate himself.

She faced him, looking so bedraggled that she was almost grotesque, but very young. "I'm not going to cry. If I once started, I think I'd never stop. And it's not just this — now. It's everything. The way you went on up there with the unit. Even the work you did — lousy —"

"Oh — it was lousy, was it?"

"Yes, it was — lousy, lousy, lousy — and you know it. Then the way you'll behave when we get back. As if it wasn't bad enough, trying to exist in that crummy little flat you had to take over from Sonia and Peter —"

"*Your* friends —"

"They aren't anybody's friends. We haven't got any friends," she continued wildly. "We haven't got anything. You're thirty-two and I'm twenty-seven — and already we've had it. Why — why? Is it you? Is it me? Is it everything? I thought it was going to be all different — and it was at first —"

He nearly told her that a girl ought to pipe down when she's looking like something the cat brought in. "You can't say I didn't warn you. Right from the start. I told you I couldn't see myself marrying anybody. Though I thought it couldn't be much worse for you than living

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with old Charlie Tilford, which is what you were doing, more or less, at the time. That can't have been very glamorous and gay. He was old enough to have been your father — and then some."

"That matters less than you think," she retorted. "And Charlie was always kind."

"He was always plastered —"

"All right, he was plastered. And he was old." She pushed back her wet fringe, to glare at him. "But he was kind — he was sweet. We weren't always shouting at each other — like this."

"I'm not shouting," he told her. "You're doing the shouting. And if you want to go back to old Charlie, you know what to do. That is, if you can persuade our little Mavis to move out." He produced a laugh of sorts but did not enjoy it.

Her mouth seemed to fall open and her eyes widened, as if to reveal some sudden desolation. Then she shook her head slowly, still wearing this tragic mask. It was not an act, and Luke found it very disturbing, as if Betty was turning into somebody else. What happened next was even more disturbing, for she began to swear at him, using the worst language she could ever have overheard in the studio, and she did it without heat and violence, almost like an obscene talking doll.

"You're talking like a foul-mouthed little slut," he announced.

"Perhaps that's what I am." Her tone was more normal now.

"I wouldn't be surprised."

"If I am, then it's your fault," she said. "You've turned me into one, Luke."

"If it had been anything good, you'd have claimed the credit yourself. But because it isn't," he continued, with a heavy sneer, "then it's my fault. I've noticed that before about women." Which was untrue but sounded well, he thought.

He did not deceive her. She was in fact hard to bamboozle in this sort of mood. "You've never noticed anything about women except the shape of their legs. So don't pretend." She wriggled impatiently. "God — these clothes! I'll have pneumonia in a minute. If you'd any sense you'd know that if you had turned me into anything we could both be proud of, I'd have given you all the credit, adored you for it. That's what a girl wants to do. Like Sonia with Peter."

"They're a bright example." He made it another heavy sneer, though actually he knew what she meant.

"All right, you don't like them. And I don't much. But they've made something together."

"What? I've never seen it."

"No, because you don't bother noticing people properly, don't know what's happening to them, just don't take them in. That's probably what's wrong with your work now — why it's so routine."

"Who says it's routine?" he shouted at her, furious at having his suspicions confirmed.

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"I do. And I'm not the only one," she continued, with an infuriating gleam of triumph. "Ask some of your drinking chums, if you can get them to tell you the truth."

It was then that the dumpy woman in black returned, to beckon and mutter. She handed Luke a glass with liquor in it, and indicated that he should wait there, after which she took Betty through the doorway on the left. Evidently they were not to be turned out into the night, which was still drumming and roaring away. Luke tried the liquor and discovered that it was excellent old brandy. After a couple of sips there was a tiny patch of high summer inside him. He had a taste for fine objects and examined the glass itself with approval. It had that tulip shape which the French prefer for brandy, and clearly was old and of unusual quality, like the liquor it held.

By the time he had swallowed the last drop of the spirit, which seemed to release into his empty stomach a sunshine he had lost for years, he felt rather tight. Too uncomfortable in his wet clothes to sit down, he prowled round the hall, like a man left alone in a museum; but the light from the solitary small lamp was very dim. He still felt anger against Betty. If she were not with him, to show her resentment and to provoke his, it might not be bad here, a little adventure, a break in the dreary familiar pattern. But not with her under the same roof. She would keep the pattern unbroken all right. If he had not felt so wet, cold and empty, he might have hurried out into the night again, braving the rain, the darkness, the miles from anywhere, to enjoy some experience he could call his own. Slowly and resentfully he turned over these thoughts, like an idle and gloomy farm worker with a pitchfork.

The old woman came back, to lead him out as she had done Betty. But this time they used another door, which opened on to a passage as cold and nearly as narrow as the grave. At the end of this passage was a short flight of back stairs, for the use of servants and visiting riff-raff like himself. The room she showed him, the first they came to at the top of the stairs, was of no great size and appeared to be as sparsely furnished as the hall. It was lit by two tall candles, flickering in the draught. In the middle of the floor, clouding the dim gold of the candlelight with steam, was a hip bath. As soon as the woman had shown him soap and towels and had gone muttering out, Luke peeled off his sodden clothes and lowered himself into that stream. There were no other clothes in sight, not even a dressing-gown, but he did not care. Here was a chance to warm, clean and dry his protesting carcass. Like most young men he was usually a casual splashy fellow in a bath, never troubling to soap and scrub himself properly; but

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this time he was thorough, enjoying the hot water and finding the hip bath more encouraging to effort than the familiar kind of tub at home.

He began thinking about Betty again, not in anger now although his resentment was still there. He went back to their first encounters in the studio, then forward from them to their marriage. Had they been happy during those first months — or merely excited? Was there something wrong with her — or with him? Or were they both all right but simply no good in partnership? Or was it life itself that ought to take the blame? And now, with this question, his resentment shifted its ground. Perhaps the answer was that you asked for a colossal feature in Technicolor when all you could have was a documentary short in black and white with some lousy cheap sound effects. Life, real life, was strictly low budget.

"Come in," he shouted, without thinking, when he heard the knock. But if these people couldn't spare a bathrobe for him, they couldn't grumble if they found him stark naked. However, it was a man who entered, a portly middle-aged fellow carrying a bundle of clothes. "I thought you might like a razor too, my dear sir," he announced, holding out an old-fashioned cut-throat. "Supper in about half-an-hour. One of us will bring you down. Horrid weather. Listen to it." He waved a hand towards the shuttered window, against which the rain was beating hard. "Now don't hurry. There's plenty of time, always plenty of time."

"Thanks very much," Luke was stammering. "Very good of you to look after us like this."

"My dear sir, the least we could do." A smile, a majestic wave of the hand, and he was gone.

Sitting upright in his bath, Luke still stared at the door, wondering if the candlelight had been playing tricks with eyes that needed hundred-volt lamps. What about the clothes that had been left for him? Hurriedly he dried the upper part of himself, then jumped out and perfunctorily towelled his feet and legs. He took the clothes over to the candles. Yes, they were the same — black silk knee-breeches, long stockings, pumps, a ruffled shirt — except that this cut-away tailed coat was dark green and the one worn by the man who had just gone had been brown. In this house you were expected to wear fancy dress, Regency costume for the men. Well, if shelter, brandy, a bath, dry clothes, and supper to follow were the least these people could do, then the least Luke Gosforth could do was to put on their fancy costume and try to keep a straight face about it. So after giving his feet another rub, be began pulling on the long black stockings. "Mikes a nice chynge, ducks," he muttered, breaking into his comic Cockney act; which he favoured when things took a strange turn and

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he was not sure quite what was happening.

II

Betty held a candle in front of the long mirror, examined her reflection there critically at first, to make certain everything fitted and there were no embarrassing disclosures; and then stepped back a pace to wonder at and enjoy what she saw. Her hair wasn't right, of course — it hadn't a clue, though she ought to be able to improve it a bit — but the general effect was terrific. She wasn't Betty Gosforth at all, and yet at the same time she felt she looked more herself, the self she was certain she possessed, than she had done for ages. Thank goodness she had good arms and shoulders and needn't be afraid (though it was a bit much, among strangers too) of this tremendous bosomy effect! She turned one way and then the other, smiling at herself over her very nice bare shoulder. The high-waisted long dress made her look much taller, more dignified than usual but more dashing and voluptuous too — a sort of Napoleonic princess. But something would have to be done with her wretched hair. She took the candle over to the dressing-table, where there was another one, and after rubbing her hair again and then combing it, she found in the little drawer below the mirror several short lengths of broad ribbon, with which she began to experiment, lost to everything at the moment but the desire to perfect her toilet.

When at last she went rustling down the broad shallow stairs, she felt peculiar, all fancy dress and glamour outside but bewildered and rather shaky within; and very hungry too. There was a man standing below, as if waiting for her. When she drew nearer, he smiled and extended a hand. Without thinking what she was doing, she put her hand into his, and allowed him to bring her to the foot of the stairs.

"Welcome," he said, still smiling and still keeping her hand in his. He was middle-aged, perhaps about fifty, and his thick springy hair had some grey in it. His face, matching his rather bulky figure, was heavy but was lightened by a quick, clear glance, which she felt at once had something very masculine about it. He was wearing some sort of stock, a ruffled shirt, a dark brown cut-away coat, black knee-breeches and stockings; but did not give the impression that he was in fancy dress. She was certain he had always worn clothes like these. And just as she was asking herself what went on in this house, as if guessing her bewilderment he continued: "My niece will be joining us in a moment. And so, I trust, will your — er — companion — husband — lover —"

"Husband," she told him, smiling too. "It's very good of you —"

"No, no, we're delighted to have company on such a night," he said, cutting her short. "And don't let us stand on ceremony. Call me Sir

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Edward — or even Ned if you prefer it. What shall I call you?"

"Betty." It was out before she could stop it. She had meant to tell him she was Mrs. Gosforth and to do a little more apologising, explain about the car and all that; but somehow she couldn't. And the next moment he was conducting her, with a hint of high ceremony, into a long panelled room where there was an uncommonly generous fire and several clusters of candles, so that it was filled with lovely warmth and light. At the far end of the room was a dining-table laid for four. Sir Edward placed her in a straight high-backed chair near the fire.

"I hope," he said, bending forward a little and looking deep into her eyes, "you will take a glass of sherry with me, Betty. You will? Excellent!" His voice was powerful, rich, like that of some famous actor; but it was oddly and rather disturbingly gentle too; quite different from the voices of Luke and his friends, which were much thinner and higher but also more aggressive. This man, she reflected as he went to the sideboard for the sherry, seemed to bend his voice and his look at you — not to throw them as Luke and his friends did — and if you were a woman, you could easily find this most disarmingly attractive. In spite of his age and queer costume, this Sir Edward was in fact a most attractive man.

"Allow me to observe," he said, looking down at her as they sipped the sherry, "that you look more than becoming in this dress."

"I adore it. Only of course my hair's all wrong."

"It's uncommonly short, Betty." He smiled at her. "Some new fashion — French, I'll be bound — that hasn't reached us before down here. But I've been admiring it. In this light, it looks like black midnight with a distant fire or two somewhere. If your eyes were dark," he continued, regarding her thoughtfully, "I might like your hair less. But you have grey eyes, I think —"

"Yes, they *are* grey." It occurred to her that nobody had bothered for ages about what colour her eyes were. It would have been much the same if she hadn't had eyes, only some electric seeing-apparatus. She smiled at this observant Sir Edward, using her eyes too.

"But a warm grey, surely, like a grey velvet in strong sunlight," he said slowly, his tone both gentler and richer than ever. He sounded rather wistful about it too, as if he had waited for years to stare into exactly this kind of eye and knew that it could be only a tantalising glimpse.

To hide her confusion, although it was not unpleasant, Betty drank some more sherry. It seemed much stronger than any sherry she had had for a long time. Now that Sir Edward was silent, though she knew he was still looking at her, this was the moment to explain about the car going into the ditch and perhaps

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to ask a cautious question or two about this house and its family and fancy dress. But somehow, when it came to the point, there did not seem any particular reason why she should.

"I call myself a gentleman," he said, almost with regret, "and so you may be sure I shan't abuse the laws of hospitality. But I must warn you, Betty, that I have a passion for Woman — and when she appears before me wearing dark hair and fine grey eyes — by Heaven — I begin to feel overmastered by that passion. So, take warning, my dear."

As she looked up at him, she asked herself if he was about to make a pass at her, and wondered wildly what she would do if he did. It just wasn't fair to a girl if a man with such a terrific line turned at once into a pouncing wolf. But all he did — and she could not have said if she felt relief or disappointment — was to give her a slow smile, and then saunter back to the sideboard to refill his glass. When he returned, he sat opposite to her, nursing his glass on his crossed knees. He looked anything but overmastered by a passion, yet something, Betty felt, still danced and flashed between them.

"Talk to me," she said, after waiting a little time. "Don't just think it — say it." As if she had known him for ages; but it was his fault.

His heavy face came to life again. "You have an odd abrupt trick of speech, Betty —"

"I'm sorry —"

"No, no. It has a certain charm, though if you were older and plain I might not think so." He smiled at her over the glass he was slowly raising.

"Tell me what you were thinking, please, Sir Edward." There again, it came out before she had time to remember they had just met.

"I was thinking," he began carefully, "that in middle life men either begin to die — and there are many Englishmen who are dead but not buried — or turn more and more, and with increasing passion, in the mind if not always in the body, to Woman. I suspect — except perhaps for priests and philosophers — we have no other choice — it is Death or Woman. You are astonished, I gather."

"Yes, I am." She regarded him gravely. "I always think of young men wanting women."

"Young men want women as they want beef and pudding. And it may be this is what most women prefer."

"I don't think so," said Betty.

"But men of my age," Sir Edward continued, "who are still alive and are not merely solid ghosts, cheating the graveyard, see Woman as the manifestation of a sublime mystery. She is both goddess and priestess out of a strange religion. She is the other side of things taking on exquisite shape and colouring, to attract us, and speaking our language to communicate with us. She carries diplomatic passport from the Moon.

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She is the last survivor of Atlantis and all the lost kingdoms. There is more in her that is at once alien, fascinating, delicious, than there is in all China. Young men, still warm from their mothers' milk, do not perceive all this. It is only when we men are growing old ourselves that we understand that Woman, though she may be all bloom and springtime, is older than we are."

"You can't look at me like that," said Betty, "and really believe what you're saying."

"Certainly I can. And there is something in you that knows what I say is true. Something that does not belong simply to you, Betty. For Betty as Betty may be shy, humble, wondering if her hair is out of place, anxious to please her company, perhaps fearful of what the night may bring —"

"How do you know that?" she cried, but not in protest against it.

"But Betty as Woman is all I have said she is. And when you can enjoy, as I can, the contrast between the simple humility of the individual girl and the pride, grandeur, and mystery of the ancient empire of Woman, then you are doubly fascinated. Then add," he went on, regarding her with a mock severity that was not without tenderness, "hair of midnight and old fires, eyes of smoke and silver — and imagine the havoc —"

A girl came into the room. Betty didn't know if she was glad or sorry to see her. It was comforting to meet another girl in this peculiar house, but even though she was only Sir Edward's niece, this girl tumbled Betty off her perch as Woman the grand and mysterious. Also, this girl was beautiful, there could be no doubt about that. She had red-gold hair, artfully tumbling in curls from a centre parting, and wide eyes of a warm hazel. Her dress was like Betty's, white and in the Empire style, but had a cunning little frill, of a pastel blue shade, that went round her bare shoulders and curved its ends in a knot on her bosom, thus shaped like an inverted heart. She was also at least two or three years younger than Betty, who had to admit that she looked a nice girl. But she would have seemed a much nicer girl if she had not looked quite so devastating.

"Uncle Ned," she announced, smiling at them sweetly, "supper's coming in."

"Betty," said Sir Edward, who was now standing, "allow me to present my niece, Julia. I promised our other guest he would be brought down to supper. Julia, my dear, he's in the small room at the back. Run up there, please, and give him a knock."

Julia floated away, leaving Betty and Sir Edward standing together on the hearth. "She looks a charming girl," Betty murmured, looking up at him.

"She is indeed. Delightful." He waited a moment, regarding her smilingly. "But for once I'll confess

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I wish she weren't with me. Though of course I'm forgetting — there's your husband." He placed a finger delicately under her chin and gently tilted her face up an inch or two. "Are you in love with your husband, Betty?"

"I was. But I don't think I am now," she replied unsteadily.

"A pity."

"Yes, that's what I think. Still—" She stopped because she had no idea what else to say. She had a strong desire, which she resisted, to close her eyes, now so near to his, with their direct masculine challenge.

"The laws of hospitality," he said softly. "No need to be pedantic about them — humph?"

"Well —" And her eyes apparently closed of their own accord. What happened now was no business of hers at all.

She felt herself gently but masterfully enclosed in his arms. There was nothing violent and passionate about the kiss that followed, otherwise, passive and helpless though she felt, she might have resented it. Nevertheless, it seemed the most personal, the most directly communicating kiss she had had for a long while. It made her feel at once enormously herself and alive, and very precious too. She opened her eyes, and withdrew gently, her knees wobbling a little.

"Somewhere between the mere pecking of salutation and the groping of mouths on their way to darkness," Sir Edward observed, "is the kiss that a man and woman exchange when they are completely aware of one another's personalities and delight in them. It is the kiss of recognition, of acceptance, of tribute, beyond friendship but not yet hounded and blinded by passion. It is the kiss of love not yet ready to destroy itself in the night. Everything that can happen is there in it but kept within the bounds of what is individual and personal, this particular man, this particular woman."

He looked at her searchingly. "Do you agree, Betty?"

She did, and as she told him so, she found herself possessed by a queer thought that everything Sir Edward said to her was something she had wanted some man to say to her, although she could not have put the words into his mouth, and that he behaved as she had wanted some man to behave, even though what he did might seem to surprise her; so that in an unreasonable fashion it was all as if she had invented him, like a dream figure. Yet there was nothing hazy and dreamlike about him and this house: they were solidly before her, unexpected, fantastic, but not at all unreal. Indeed, it was the rest of the day, with its fuss and squalor, its journey through the rain and deepening darkness to nowhere, its meaningless squabbling, that now seemed unreal.

"Yes, Sir Edward," she was saying, "I've always felt that. . . ."

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III

The clothes were not a bad fit, and Luke rather fancied himself in the dark green coat. All that was wrong now was the stock or cravat or whatever it was called, which had defeated him for the last ten minutes. He was still holding it, sadly crumpled, when somebody knocked and he went to open the door. The girl looked so beautiful, it hurt.

"I'm Julia," she said, "and my uncle sent me to bring you down to supper. You must be hungry."

He found some breath. "Yes, I am — rather," he stammered. "Er — my name's Luke Gosforth. Do you know how to tie one of these things? I was just giving it up."

She smiled. "I can try. Now stand quite still, please."

He did stand still but his mind was blazing and whirling. It was as if every other girl he had ever seen was nothing but a faint copy of this one, as if in fact he had never really seen a girl before. And he was the fellow who had been telling himself that life, real life, was strictly low budget. This girl burst any budget. Life had pulled something out of a bag he didn't know was there: "I'll show you, Gosforth," it had replied. By the time she had finished tying that thing, in a fragrant kaleidoscope of red-gold curls, eyes with flecks of green and gold in them, round white arms and shoulders, he felt half drunk.

"There!" She smiled at him, as if he were an emperor. "Now we'll go down. Will you bring a candle, please?"

Halfway along the passage below, no longer as cold and narrow as the grave, he stopped her. "Just a minute, please, Julia," he began, holding the lighted candle high between them. "I'm calling you Julia because that's all the name you gave me, so I hope you don't mind. I want to say first that I'm very grateful for the wonderful way you're looking after us. Thank you very much, Julia."

She looked at him without smiling, her eyes enormous and rather dark in that wavering light. "You have no need to thank me, Luke. You wanted us, I think, and here we are."

The ghost of a thought visited him then, like a cold finger tapping his spine; but he beat it down, determined to keep everything on a sensible level. "Nice of you to put it like that, Julia. But I also wanted to say this. I might find it hard to start questioning your uncle — and don't want to embarrass anybody — so before we join the others, could you just give me a quick line on the set-up here?"

"A quick line — on the set-up?" She looked as bewildered as she sounded.

Again, some moth-wing of a thought brushed his mind, and again he took a firm grip on sense and reality. "You know what I mean," he said apologetically. "No business

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of mine, I agree. But it might stop me making a fool of myself later. So — tell me — why are we all wearing these clothes? What goes on here?"

"What do you want to go on here?" she said, no longer bewildered. "Is this the wrong way to live? Do you wish to show us a better way?" She waited a moment, and then, when he did not answer her: "They are waiting for us, I must remind you." She put out a hand.

When his hand closed over hers, he could have shouted for joy. Everything suddenly expanded; the world was rich and wide. "Okay, don't explain anything, Julia. I don't want to know. I'll tell you this, though. I couldn't show you a better way. I couldn't show anybody anything, though I'm supposed to. I've been living like a rat in a cage." He felt a little tug. "Yes, let's go. Sorry for the hold-up."

But he halted her again just as they reached the last door. "Look, Julia," he whispered, "don't think I'm out of my mind — though perhaps I am and it might be the sort of mind to be out of. But I must talk to you alone some time tonight. I couldn't leave here without talking to you. If I did, tomorrow would be even worse than today and yesterday."

"I knew at once you were unhappy," she said softly. "Why are you?"

"That's what I want to talk about, partly. So can we get together somewhere, just the two of us? It wouldn't be the same with anybody else there. Can we, Julia?"

She nodded. "After supper. And now we must go in."

The portly fellow in the brown coat was standing before the fire, and with him was another beautiful girl, dressed more or less like Julia, but quite different, a dark mysterious creature. There are some men who seem to claim the right to be surrounded by beautiful women, and evidently this fellow was one of them.

"Prompt to the moment," he cried jubilantly. "The food's on the table. The wine's in the decanter. Luke, isn't it? I'm Sir Edward — or Ned, if it takes your fancy and we don't quarrel. Now, Luke, give Julia an arm. Come, my dear." He said this, offering an arm, to the dark mysterious beauty; and as she turned, no longer withdrawn but as smiling and gracious as a young queen, Luke saw that it was Betty. She gave him a look that was even more disturbing than her changed appearance, for it was not an angry look, an anxious or questioning look, not any look she had ever given him before as a wife: it was serene and not unfriendly but without any feeling or even any curiosity.

So they went with some ceremony down the long room to the table at the end. Luke and Sir Edward sat facing one another; and Luke had Julia upon his right and a little

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closer to him than Betty was, the table having been laid in this way. No servant came in. Sir Edward served the rich soup and then carved the roast chicken. Luke ate slowly, which was unusual for him, and felt that for once he was enjoying each mouthful.

After Sir Edward had begged them formally to take wine with him and had filled their glasses, he began making a speech at them, which did not surprise Luke, who had already guessed that here was a man who loved the sound of his own voice. Betty never took her eyes off the man, and gave the impression that she was willing to sit there all night listening to him orate. But to Luke's joy there was a moment when Julia turned her peach-bloom face towards him and made a tiny grimace, as if she had guessed his thought and was showing her agreement with it. God's truth — she was the honey of the world!

"You and I, my dear Luke," Sir Edward was saying, "are fortunate men to have such ladies at our elbow. But they are here, I think, because we deserve them. Not entirely, of course, for that would be impossible, but so far as men can deserve such ladies, we deserve these. We have the eyes to observe their beauty, the minds to record, to remember and praise their charms. If they are Eros, then we are Logos. The word and the deed are with us, so we have magic too. We offer them strong arms, tender hearts, and, when the wine has gone round three or four times more, minds that shall seem enchanted kingdoms to them. For they can no more do without us than we can without them."

"No, of course not," cried Betty boldly, and held out her glass to him.

"Speak to us, friend Luke," Sir Edward continued, with one eye still on Betty. "You are still young, and a noble fellow. Poetry burns in you, I see it in your eye. Come, set these ladies delicately but surely on fire. Restore to me the green but blazing madness of my youth, before I turn complete philosopher and take this table and company into Greenland. Julia, command him."

He could not hear what she said, perhaps she said nothing but only made mocking but tender motions with her lips; but her glowing look was an invitation to a new life, as if he had fallen heir to some fabulous estate. Through his mind went pattering, like rats down a corridor, the familiar staccato phrases of disillusion and fear, the double-talk of the world of double gins; but not in that fashion did he speak, when he found himself standing, looking down upon them, glass in hand. The words seemed to arrive, and be roundly spoken, of their own accord.

"Ladies — Sir Edward," he heard himself saying, "all my life I have wished to be here as I am tonight. It is not true that I am a noble fellow. I am a miserable fellow. But

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now I am not such a miserable fellow as I have long imagined myself to be. That is because I am here, speaking to you like this." He shot a glance at Julia and what he saw in her face turned his heart over. "I did not know this was what I wanted. I only knew, though I pretended not to know and hated my pretence, that days, months, years, were hurrying past while my life was merely being endured and not lived. I drew an evil magician's circle and existed within it, watching colour drain out of the rose and fire and gold leave the sun. I disinherited myself, planned my own starvation. I was afraid of joy, so joy never came. I believed the past to be a graveyard, the future a menace. That left me with a present time that was never anything but a tasteless wafer. My life lacked spacious dimensions; there was no room in it for style, ceremony, admiration, deep feeling, and the enchantment of long vistas. There was an artist in me and I put a rope round his neck. There was a friend, and I sneered him into banishment. There was a lover, but I could not feed him with wonder and faith. I could neither love God nor defy Him. I was too corrupt for Heaven and not lively enough for Hell. I have lived, a dusty midget, on the endless desert of cement. I would have been already half an insect, lost as a man, if some unquenched spark of soul had not for ever kept alive the resentment that burned in me. No, Sir Edward, my friend — no poetry burned in me, only resentment, though that may have been the defiance of the poet dying within me. I — and all my kind — we are the resenters; and there is a terrible despair in our resentment, for while we know we have been disinherited and cheated, we also know we have contrived to disinherit and cheat ourselves. But for once, here, tonight, I am where I might always have been. I was ready to resent you, Sir Edward — to question your generosity, to mock at your offer of friendship, to make your food seem unpalatable, your wine taste sour — but now I say you are indeed the noble fellow you said I was. That lady — so richly dark and delicately glowing — is my wife, and I know now that I have never really seen her before as she is — or as she might be; and she does well to turn away from me, to look at and listen to a better man, whose eyes and tongue do not rob her of her true inheritance. As for Julia — why should I hide what I feel? All my life I have loved her. Without seeing her, without being certain she existed, I have loved her. She is the very face of beauty — and all that is gentle and good besides — and now that I have seen her and she has spoken to me, she possesses my heart for ever."

He sat down, drained his glass, then met the dazzling look that Julia was giving him. Her hand came across the table and he raised it to his lips. Then it stayed within his

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grasp, small and still yet as marvellously filled with life as a bird. Were the candles dimming and turning flame into smoke, or was it the sunburst of happiness inside him that made the table seem darker? Soon he was asking himself other questions. Had he really made that elaborate speech, so far removed from his customary talk, or had he merely sat there imagining himself making such a speech? Did he kiss Julia's hand and then hold it? Once he had had a dream within a dream. Was this one of them?

Certainly, candle after candle guttered and smouldered and darkness crept along the table. It was hard to see Betty now — she seemed much further away too — and it was she who was talking to them. If you could call it talking, for the words, clear and high, seemed to come floating out of her. "I am a woman," he caught, then kept his attention steady, not to miss the rest, "and now at last, when I had begun to feel our life was all a cheat, I have met a Man, and for an hour I have begun to live as a woman should live. And as she expects to live. I do not know how it is with men — and perhaps there is less difference between us than we think — but we women grow up with expectations that owe nothing to our mothers, nurses, governesses, who tell us too little of these things. Then Nature starts us flowering, but we may wither still in bud unless the society of man ripens us. The hidden pattern of our unfolding is known to us somehow, so that we see it fragmentarily in dreams, are tantalised by it, and then driven to a terrible despair, in which we care nothing if we make life hateful to all around us. We feel we possess in secret essence, waiting to be released into the air, everything that could delight a man, whatever his mood, while it delights us too. But unless we ripen, we are nothing. We are flower and fruit that must have gardeners. Because we are so much closer to Nature than man is, we know that Nature is not enough. Man must complete us, not only in his capacity as the lover but also as the creator of a society, a style of life, in which we can grow. And now I have found that Man. To leave him would be unimaginable. Not to share a roof with him even for half a day would be a little death. Dear Ned, now I can never let you go."

All the wicks in the central candelabra seemed to be smoking, and beyond them Sir Edward's face was nothing but a blur of crimson: it might have been a great mask carried in some distant torchlight procession. What was the man saying? Luke tried to concentrate his attention. "For my part, my dear," he heard, "I believe what are most necessary are style, energy and good humour. Energy without style brings barbarism. Style without energy results in corruption and death. But even style with energy, energy with style, must have good humour too, other-

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wise we might be Asiatic conquerors or Caesar Borgia. I do not ask for saintliness, for I am thinking of this world, which is all I know, and not the next, which may not be there and even if it is can wait for us. I ask for a cheerful temper, for unwearied tolerance and kindness, without which we could erect a hell on earth in six months. Sheer good-nature is sadly under-valued. But there must be energy behind it or it becomes torpid. And good humour and energy must express themselves in a fine style of life."

"With light, if you'll allow me to say so," Luke called down the table, "more than we have here at this moment."

"To say nothing of coffee and brandy," cried Sir Edward. And Luke could just see him rising hastily. "We must serve ourselves, but I'll do it."

Betty had risen too. "I'm coming with you, Ned." There was some urgency in her tone.

"Why not, my dear Betty, why not?" He was jovial as he reached for a candlestick. "We'll go hand-in-hand."

"But they'll come back here," Luke said to Julia as soon as they were alone. "And remember your promise. After supper, you said."

She stood up, so white, so golden, that it appeared as if she needed no light to be seen, as if light came from her. "I have not forgotten. Dear Luke! Come, you must sit by the fire while you are waiting." She led him down the room. "I shall go for coffee and brandy too — if you would like some brandy — yes? But I shall take them up to the Library, which is always warm, and there you can talk to me as long as you please. To find the Library you go up the main staircase, not the little one where your room is, turn to the right and go along the landing and then you will see a short staircase at the end, on the left, and at the top of that staircase is the Library. It has double doors, and the inner one is covered with green baize. Be there in half an hour, not sooner because there are things I must do first. Now is there anything you want here, Luke?"

"Yes," he replied ruefully, "tobacco. I smoke all the time —"

"Sit there, and you shall have tobacco," she cried, with all the bustling gaiety of a girl who is happy to be waiting upon a man. It was incredible, but there it was — she seemed as happy to be with him as he was with her. "There." And she handed him a tobacco-box and a long churchwarden clay pipe. "And don't smoke yourself into a stupor or you won't be able to talk to me. And remember — the Library in half an hour, and it's at the top of the short staircase at the end of the landing."

After she had gone he filled the churchwarden, rather clumsily for he had never been a pipe-smoker, and lit it with a brand from the dying fire. He pulled the narrow

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high-backed chair closer, fitted himself into it snugly, crossed his legs, and began puffing away at the fragrant Virginia tobacco. He did not look like Luke Gosforth, was not behaving like him, and now to crown all — and to the astonishment of that central recording little self which might be the essential Luke Gosforth or might be some impersonal atom of pure intelligence — he no longer thought like Luke Gosforth. His consciousness was no longer like an angry cascading stream but more like some broad placid river. The usual staccato phrases, jeering, protesting, fearful, that went crackling through his mind as he pulled at a cigarette, strode about a room or humped himself into an easy chair, were no longer tormenting him; and in their place were large serene thoughts that came floating along the river like nobly coloured barges. He discovered in himself no noticeable pieces of wisdom; yet he felt wise, and the master, not the agitated slave, of experience. It was a moment, he felt, for planning some great work that would take years and fill them with creation. He was no longer a rat in a cage, he was a man at the end of a good day. . . .

IV

When Betty left Sir Edward to go up to her room, where she remembered seeing a shawl she needed now, he told her not to return down there but to look for him in the Library, at the head of the short staircase that she would find at the end of the landing. Carrying a small brass candlestick, she found her room easily enough. In all her life, she felt, she had never before known such happiness as this. There were in fact three shawls and she amused herself trying them on in different ways. After deciding on the smallest but fleeciest, she unfastened the ribbon in her hair and used her comb again. The face she saw, not too well in the light of one small candle, was the face she had always wanted to see in every mirror, the face that had been waiting in some secret store for such a time as this, a face that was at the furthest remove from the angry hag's countenance she had worn in the car. She remembered what happened in the car and the unpleasant scene she had had with Luke after they arrived here; but now all that seemed part of a dream she had had, one of those dreams both confused and wildly improbable that can yet make the dreamer feel wretched. She did not understand the events of the last hour or so, how they could come about, what sensible explanation there was of them; but then so far she had never really tried to understand them, had no desire to live in that part of the mind which could begin to make ordinary sense out of them. She was alive now, whereas only a few hours ago she had felt half dead. Why should she ask questions when she had suddenly

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been transformed from a hard, angry little thing into a fountain of joy? Vague memories of fairy tales returned to her, tales in which the over-curious, the obstinate enquirers, only cut themselves off from the good magic.

Now, with no more she could usefully do to herself, she was on fire again to be with Sir Edward, in whose presence she felt herself to be lovely and gracious and almost wise. She had more than once fancied herself to be in love, not only with Luke but also before and after she had married him, with men of his sort, brittle and demanding; but always she had felt herself working up an excitement to keep the affair going, like people at a party, and had found herself hurrying away from various doubts and hesitations, pretending they did not exist; so that the whole of her was far from being completely involved, absorbed. But with Sir Edward it was as if she began from the true centre of her being, and none of the delicious excitement had to be manufactured, while at the heart of the relationship was a wonderful calm, the peace of certainty. In whatever time and place he existed, she belonged to him.

She stood still for a moment or two outside her room carefully shielding her candle from the draught. She could hear the steady drumming of the rain and nothing else, not a sound. The house seemed immense, cavernous. She wondered whether Sir Edward had already gone up to the Library; she had never heard him pass her room; but then he might have used another staircase. This house no longer seemed the compact Queen Anne type of small mansion she had imagined it to be when she first arrived. Most houses she reflected uneasily, appear much larger at a first glance than they seem to be on further acquaintance, whereas this house, in a disturbing fashion, began to grow, and the longer you were in it the bigger it seemed. This staircase, descending into darkness, was not the staircase the old woman had first shown her, though it led to and from the same room. Should she go and find the Library or look for Sir Edward below? Irresolutely she drifted down and halted at the foot of the stairs, hoping to hear a sound that would tell her he was still somewhere on the ground floor. Hearing nothing, then spurred by something like panic, she hurried upstairs, going as fast as her trailing skirts and the care of her precious candle-flame would allow her to go.

There was a terrifying scuttling somewhere along the landing, and after that nothing to be heard there except her heart behaving like a trapped bird. The floor was uncarpeted and its boards worn and uneven. The air along there was cold and seemingly thick with dust. Several of the bedrooms' doors were open, but she hurried past without so much as a glance inside. At the

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end she remembered to turn left up the short staircase, which brought her to a stout door that was half open, uncovering a green baize door that was closed. She knocked at this second door, waited a moment or two, then pushed it open, discovering at once that Sir Edward was not there, nothing but cold darkness. And there was a patch of cold darkness in her mind now. She went down to the landing again and heard a horrid slithering behind one of the open doors. Her happiness a bright wreck, she felt alone and afraid. She began to run; the flame she tried to shield wavered dangerously; she had to stop to allow it to burn upright again. If this inch of flame vanished, she felt she might be lost for ever.

At the head of the main staircase, which looked large enough now for some ruined opera house, she began calling to him, telling him where she was, begging him to come and find her. But all that came back were echoes, strange echoes like so much mockery. Her final call became a scream, a scream cut off by a sob. For she knew then, with a desolate finality, like a blow delivered at the heart, that it was useless to call for Sir Edward, that he was no longer in that house, no longer in any world or time where her cries could reach him.

V

After the first ten minutes or so had gone by, Luke thought that at any moment Betty and Sir Edward might return. He was not surprised, however, when they did not come back; they were probably making long speeches at one another in some kitchen or pantry. He was not carrying a watch and there seemed to be no clock in this long room; he had to guess at the half-hour Julia asked him to wait. Finally, taking two candles for good measure, he went off to find the Library. He took two wrong turnings, along narrow passages, before arriving at the main staircase, which he had not seen before. After that it was easy enough to follow Julia's instructions, turning to the right at the head of the staircase and then going along the landing until he found the short flight of stairs. And there were the double doors she had described; he could see the green baize on the inner door.

"Julia, I'm here," he cried, all joy and excitement, with a vision of the two of them talking for hours in this Library, so remote and yet so snug and companionable with its calf-lined walls. "Here I am," he shouted idiotically as he charged in, "here I am."

The room was empty, bare, and had the damp chill of an endless winter. It had been a library once, for there were still some shelves on two of the walls and even a few shabby books heaped together in one corner. Cold ashes and a litter of half-burnt paper filled the grate. Patches of damp had not merely stained the walls and ceiling but had

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eaten into them. There was not a single piece of furniture in the room, only an old packing case. Nobody could have read a book here for the last thirty years. It was a room that had forgotten what human beings are like. Luke felt sick with misery.

He could hear the rain and the creaking of a shutter somewhere, and that was all. It was impossible to believe now that the room he had left, still bright with the image of Julia, was only two flights of stairs away. Terrible suspicions, for which he refused to find words, came creeping into the back of his mind. What if — once you left that long room below — you could take a wrong turning in time? Where was Julia? Where was she waiting for him with that coffee and brandy? He knew — and desperately wished he didn't know — that this was the Library she meant. He began shivering: there was ice squeezing his heart.

Then he heard steps, slow dragging steps but coming nearer. He could not move, only listen. The stairs creaked. Tremulous candlelight appeared in the doorway. His welcoming shout of "Julia!" was hope against all sense, and the hope died before the last echo faded.

"Luke," said Betty as she came forward, pale, her eyes deep-set and smudged, still dressed as she had been at the supper table but without the beauty she had worn then, not even elegant any longer, just a girl wearing the wrong clothes, "Luke, I thought it must be you." She stared about her for a moment. "Yes, I knew it would look like this. I think that's why I didn't come in before. I knew somehow." She looked at him. "Were you going to meet her here?"

"Yes," he said, looking away, towards the empty shelves. "We'd arranged to talk after supper, and she told me to come up here."

"That's what he told me." She spoke without expression, as a sleepwalker might talk. "And I came as far as the door. I think I knew then."

"Knew what?"

"That he isn't here — not now. And she isn't here either, of course." She shook her head slowly. "I'm certain now there's nobody here but us. Not even that old woman — though of course she was quite different from them."

"What do you mean, Betty?" He was rather angry.

"I mean," she said carefully, "that we might see her in the morning. But we shan't see them. Not ever. Luke, don't be cross. I couldn't bear it."

"You won't have to. I'm trying to understand, that's all. And it was a hell of a shock when I charged in here expecting to see her —"

She nodded. "You needn't tell me. It happened to me too. And that's something, I suppose — that it happened to both of us. We ought to remember that. It's important."

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"Yes, but what happened? And if we're going to talk, let's get out of this morgue. Let's go downstairs — where we had supper. That room's warm." He stopped there, stared at her, changed his tone. "Or isn't it? Perhaps that's just a cold empty dump too with nothing in it but a couple of packing cases. But look — damn it!" he cried angrily, "I'm still wearing these clothes — *their* clothes. So are you. And we had supper together, didn't we, the four of us — you don't deny that?"

"No, I don't." She sounded tearful. "But, please, Luke, don't be angry about it all. Don't let's start quarrelling again. I really couldn't bear it now."

"All right, I won't, Betty. I'm not really angry, certainly not with you. But we did have supper, all four of us — and you and he and I made speeches. Or didn't we? Am I making that up?"

"You and he did. I didn't. How could I?"

"I thought you did — about what women wanted —"

"No, I just listened to you two. And talked to him a little. But that doesn't matter now. Let's go down. We can't stay here."

As they moved to the door, carrying their candles, Luke stopped and pointed. "Look at that."

"What? I don't see anything."

He jabbed a finger at the wall. "An electric light switch. And I never noticed any before." He tried it but nothing happened. "There's no longer a fitting in here, and probably the electricity's been cut off anyhow. Let's save two of these candles. Keep close to me, I know the way down."

"Did this house seem to you to get bigger and bigger?" she asked as they went down. "It did to me — just when everything began to turn sinister and awful. I think it was when there wasn't a proper time — when it wasn't *then* and hadn't got back to *now*."

"Don't let's start on that yet." He was silent for a few moments as he led the way. "I believe you when you say they're not here. I feel they're not here now. But we're still wearing these clothes — and we had supper in that long room — that I'll swear. So let's wait for more evidence."

They entered the long room at the opposite end from the table. As soon as they were inside, Luke exclaimed: "There you are! This hasn't changed. Same furniture. The fire's not quite out yet. It's exactly as I remember it. I left those two candles burning — there they are. Now let's have a look at that supper table."

It was the same table but it was not the same meal that had been eaten there. Only two chairs had been drawn up to it, not four, and clearly only two people had used these plates and cutlery. On the table were some remaining bits of tinned meat, a dry hunk of cheese and half a loaf of bread. Near one place was a small teapot, jug of milk,

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cup and saucer, and at the other an empty beer bottle kept company with a glass still laced with froth.

"But I drank wine," Luke protested, "and had soup, roast chicken —"

"I had pâté and an omelette," cried Betty.

"You couldn't," Luke began; but then he checked himself. "Let's go over to the fire. No point in staring at this stuff."

"These are exactly the same chairs," said Betty when they reached the hearth. "Everything here's just the same as it was. What are you looking for?"

"A round tobacco-box and a churchwarden pipe. They were here before. I used them. But they're not here now." He poked around for a minute, while Betty sat silent. "Hello! Just what I wanted."

"What have you found?" She looked towards the sideboard.

"Five cigarettes in a packet. Right at the back here. They must have been here some time — very dry and dusty — but they'll do. Want one?"

"Yes, please. Hope it isn't stealing."

"We'll make it right with somebody in the morning."

They smoked for a while without exchanging another word, both of them staring into what was left of the fire. They had the air of being survivors after some catastrophe.

"What did you want to talk to her about?" Betty asked finally.

"Anything. Everything. It didn't matter. I hadn't planned a discussion. I just wanted to be with her."

"I did with him."

"Yes, I know you did," said Luke not unamiably. "We're both in the same boat."

"That's the one thing that makes it better," she said. "It would have been much worse if it had happened just to one of us. You're not feeling jealous about him, are you?"

"Not yet, though I think I could be," he confessed.

"You're not because you're not thinking about me — you're still thinking about her."

"Do you mind?"

"No, not yet," she said. "I'm like you. It's the same for both of us. We've lost them. And I'm certain neither of them can ever be found again. So here we are, to make the best of it."

There was so little light either from the fire or the spluttering candles that they might have been sitting in the dusk of some warm cave. The night still sounded wet and wild; it was easy to imagine a new Deluge beginning out there.

"They never seemed ghostly to me, you know," said he, after a bit.

"They weren't ghosts." She was decisive.

"What were they, then? People in another time? I've read and heard stories about people going back in time."

"I was thinking about that," she said eagerly.

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"But then they merely saw and heard things," he continued slowly, "as spectators. They didn't join in as we did. Talking, holding hands, having supper together."

"Look at the remains of that supper there. What a swiz! Typical of us and our time too."

"No, listen, Betty," he said earnestly. "We must get this bit right. You might be able to slip along the fourth dimension or whatever it is — and don't take me up on this, I'm very hazy about it — and then perhaps see people living a hundred-and-fifty years ago. But you wouldn't really be there with them, couldn't join in as we did. Otherwise, it would mean two different times — then and now — overlapping in a third and quite different sort of time, if you see what I mean."

"No, I don't really, Luke. It's much too complicated."

"I know, that's what I'm saying. It's worse than those two women at Versailles. But what *did* happen then?"

She waited a moment, then began very carefully. "This is what I think. There were two people, Sir Edward Somebody and his niece, Julia, who once lived here, and who looked and behaved like the two we saw tonight. We arrived here very tired and on edge, wondering what was going to happen to us, and then when we relaxed and put these clothes on — well, Sir Edward and Julia happened. But — no, please, listen, Luke, this is the difficult part and if you interrupt I may lose the thread of it — but we were never *really* with them. I mean, they hadn't an independent life, as real people have. They looked themselves — we didn't make up their appearance — but what they said and did was what we wanted them to say and do, as if we were playwrights and they were characters in our play —"

"Now wait a minute, Betty," he protested. "You're not going to tell me that Julia —"

"Yes, I am," she cut in sharply. "And Sir Edward too, though I hate to say so. Didn't they always behave as we wanted them to behave? Just think, Luke. I felt some of this at the time."

"You mean you've always wanted a Sir Edward?" he asked, puzzled and displeased.

"Not consciously, no," she replied, a glint of amusement in her glance. "But he must have represented important things I did want, mostly without my knowing it. Just as Julia, who was probably rather a dull girl, a Regency version of the dumb blonde, was all marvellous and magical to you. He made me feel like that, because that's what I was wanting somebody to make me feel. Not always — that's too much to expect — but at times. And all the marvellous and magical feeling you had about Julia belonged to you, came from some part of you that was beginning to feel frustrated. Don't you see, darling," she con-

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tinued in a tone she had not used with him for a long time, "that we arrived here not only wet and cold and lost but feeling utterly frustrated and miserable, just angry bits of ourselves that had been worked almost to death? And the Sir Edward and Julia we met, not the ones who really lived here, were those parts we'd neglected and forgotten. So we acted in a sort of play with them. It all started because we put these clothes on and not our own. We had to behave in a different way. But we couldn't do it with each other so we had to have those two as well, to help us out."

"That doesn't quite work," he said, "though I see what you mean. He brought me the clothes. Or I thought he did. Spoke to me too — I was still in my bath then. Didn't talk about style — that was later. Did you hear that?"

"Yes," she cried eagerly, "but all that was something, I'm sure, that I hadn't quite thought out for myself but that I'd already felt. Don't you see?"

"What I do see," he said, with a defiant air, "is that it's all very well for some Regency buck to talk about style and the grand manner in living. He could cope with it, I can't. But then I haven't got my foot on anybody's face, have to pay my own way, and no kids get up in the dark to make money for me in cotton mills and coal mines. If that's what his style depends on, he can have it. I'll still go tatting round pubs and cafeterias wearing a dirty shirt and oily pants. And you'll still be in the fish queue and the two-bob seats at the cinema. But nobody can say we're living on other people's daylight. Style my foot!"

"Yes, yes, of course we couldn't live like that," she cried, "but it isn't *style your foot*. He didn't say those things. How could he? *We* said them. You said them to me. I said them to you. That was the only way we could do it — to express what we must have been feeling deep down about ourselves and our lives. And Luke — please — don't be tough and aggressive about it. We've both had enough of that, and it isn't us, but all a dreary fake anyhow. Just be quiet and think for a minute or two, remembering what we were like when we arrived here and what you felt afterwards."

"We came in wet and snarling," he said slowly, "and then soon it was different." As he tried to remember all that had happened — and much of it was confused, incredible — he was aware of Betty watching him intently, although her eyes were invisible and her face nothing but a pale oval in that dusk.

"If people ever look back on us — our generation, I mean — and try to give a verdict on us," he said finally, "they'll have to say we had a hell of a lot of faults but at least we were trying to be honest. No pretence at all costs — that's been our slogan. No doubt we've gone too far —"

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"Much too far," she cried. "I'm sick of this honesty that leaves everything looking small, ugly and mean. And there's plenty of pretence too — neurotics pretending to be tough, tired frightened people getting rough and sexy on gin. Sheer laziness and sloppiness too — the men can't bother shaving and finding a clean shirt, the girls won't take a bath and change their underclothes. Yes, I know it's all more difficult — nobody need tell *me* that — but if we only tried to stop shuffling round and slopping about, jeering at and cheapening life — if we brought to it energy and good humour and some sense of style —" And here she broke off.

He stood in front of her and took her hands in his; her hands were cold, so he brought them together and began to warm them between his encircling palms. "You felt a shiver down your spine then, didn't you?" he said softly. "So did I. It's a good thing both of us experienced whatever happened tonight. If it had been only one of us —"

"It would have been hopeless," she told him hastily. "It's because it happened to both that there's some hope for us. But love isn't just grabbing sex when you need it and sharing a bath and a frying pan. All women know that. You have to work at it, to build something."

"The trouble is," he said, "a fellow wants to knock off, to take it easy. Yes, I know, Betty, that he expects more than he's a right to expect. You can't dress a relationship in rags and kick it around, and then ask it to satisfy a sudden demand for glamour and glory. And if we stop making these demands, we may soon find ourselves in an anthill —"

"Oh — Luke — I'm sure you said something like that," she cried. "Don't you remember?"

"I remember a little time — part of a dream or some time that doesn't really belong to us — when you were a beautiful and bewitching being and I was a noble fellow, burning poetry and waiting to show you a mind that would seem like an enchanted kingdom to you. Yes," he continued, "I remember all that and more, and I'll try never to forget. And because I'll know that you're remembering too, you'll always seem different from any other woman —"

"Oh — yes, my darling — that's what I've been trying to say —"

"What we can do I don't know, and I'm certainly not going to work it out tonight. But from now on, at least, the names of Betty and Luke Gosforth will not be found in any heats of the rat race. And now — for I'm certain we have this place to ourselves — I must find you a bed, dear Mrs. Gosforth —"

"There's a large one in that room where I dressed," said Betty, and kissed him. On the way up, she murmured sleepily: "I still don't understand about these clothes and the old woman. And they're in this world all right."

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"They are," he said, "and so, with luck, tomorrow morning ought to be able to throw some light on them."

VI

It was not a morning to throw much light on anything; not raining still, but with water everywhere, and even the sunlight struggling through an atmosphere that seemed as much water as air. But it brought them a Mrs. Rogers, a beaky, bird-eyed woman, one of those who cover an immense interior good-nature and desire to help with an appearance of snapping fury. She had come up from the village of her own accord; she finished drying their clothes, gave them hot water, and even contrived a rough-and-ready breakfast for them; but she never stopped giving a performance as a woman who had been press-ganged into a hideous service.

"She's a blessing and all that," said Luke, over his boiled egg, "but we'll never find out anything from her."

"Yes, we shall," Betty declared, out of her experience of the vast ruinous underworld of London chars. "Just leave it to me, darling."

"I'd have to do that anyhow. In five minutes I'm off to buy some cigarettes and to find somebody who'll pull the car out of that ditch. And give this Mrs. Rogers a pound — here you are, while I remember — but suggest she might split it with last night's old woman, if she can be found. By the way, did you ever understand anything that old woman said?"

"Not much," Betty replied. "But I'll get it all out of this Mrs. Rogers, you'll see."

An hour later, they met in the small square hall, and as he lit the cigarette she had immediately demanded, Luke said: "I've got the bags out of the car and arranged for it to be lifted and gone over. I sent a wire to the studio. And there's a taxi coming in ten minutes to take us to the station. What's your news, woman?"

"Straight from the Rogers Service, darling," she replied. "The old woman we saw last night — Mrs. Grashki, or something like that — is a Czech. She looks after this house but lives with a daughter next door to Mrs. Rogers. Last night she was working late, luckily for us — and was actually sorting out a mass of old things. This house has belonged for centuries to a family called Periton — all baronets. The present Baron — Sir Leslie — is in the diplomatic service, so he's always abroad. Well, Mrs. Grashki, who's obviously a character, thought we looked terrible last night and thought how much nicer we'd look in some of the old things she'd been sorting out. So she put some out for us. Then after filling our baths — both the boiler and the electric light plant aren't functioning — and scraping together a bit of supper for us, probably having a peep and a giggle

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at us, she suddenly thought she'd gone too far, took fright, and ran home. She was thoroughly soaked of course, found herself laid up with rheumatism, and sent an S.O.S. to Mrs. Rogers, who nobly responded. I'm just saying," said Betty as Mrs. Rogers marched in, "you nobly responded to Mrs. Grashki's call."

"I did what I could," cried Mrs. Rogers angrily, "but if you ask me, that Mrs. Grashki's not all there — playing tricks like that at her age — and not the first neither. Thinks she's still abroad, that's her trouble. But Sir Leslie took a fancy to her, being abroad a lot too. That one there's Sir Leslie's grandfather — Sir Eustace," she pointed to one of the portraits. "And I could tell you some tales of him too."

"Darling — look!" cried Betty rather shakily. She had gone to take a closer view of Sir Eustace. He went across to stand by her side, and then he felt her fingers digging into his arm until they hurt. "There — don't you see?" And in a moment he did. The portrait of Sir Edward Periton was excellent, although the sitter's brown coat did not come out too well. The portrait of Miss Julia Periton was smaller and less successful, but the tumbling red-gold curls were admirably suggested, and her white Empire dress, with its pastel blue frill that went round the bare shoulders, was not badly done.

"Yes," said Mrs. Rogers with some complacency, as she joined them, "there's some more — and I could tell you some tales of these Peritons."

"So could I," said Luke.

Coming Next Month

Ward Moore is, I'm firmly convinced, one of the most important living writers of science fiction, ranking with Bradbury and Clarke and Sturgeon in that small group which simultaneously creates s.f. and literature; and your letters concerning such stories as *Lot* and *Bring the Jubilee* indicate that Moore is also one of the most popular purveyors of stimulating entertainment. In our next issue (on the stands around March 1), Moore's novelet *No Man Pursueth* is at once a character study of a charming actress and a tale of a strange disturbance in time — and I think you'll agree it's one of Moore's best stories yet. The other feature novelet is J. Francis McComas' *Shock Treatment*, a dramatic venture into the almost untouched field of future penology. There'll be short stories by Robert Bloch, Tom Godwin, John Novotny and others, and an official article by the United States Air Force presenting the USAF's views (and the statistical reasons therefor) on Unidentified Aerial Objects — to the layman, "flying saucers."

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I don't know why the Rosicrucians believe that science-fiction readers are particularly likely converts to their Ancient and Mystical Order: I should have thought the opposite would be true. But anyone who reads s.f. is bound to have seen the alluring advertisements of AMORC (and these ads must draw replies from the s.f. audience, or AMORC would stop running them — a disturbing thought), and it's high time that this group of readers was offered a summary of the facts behind the mystic claims. I'm pleased to say that this is the first of a series of articles for F&SF, on widely varied topics, by L. Sprague de Camp, who knows more facts about more (and odder) subjects than seems decently possible for one man. Watch for another de Camp article here soon!

What Is a Rosicrucian?

by L SPRAGUE DE CAMP

IF YOU READ MANY MAGAZINES, you have come across the advertisements of the Ancient and Mystical Order Rosae Crucis, otherwise AMORC or The Rosicrucians.

These advertisements run to pictures of planets and nebulae and naked individuals striking inspirational attitudes. They are headed, THE MAGIC OF MIND; WHAT STRANGE POWERS DID THE ANCIENTS POSSESS?; CAN WE RECOLLECT OUR PAST LIVES?; and A SECRET METHOD FOR THE MASTERY OF LIFE. They contain intriguing hints about the wisdom of the ancient Egyptians and Pythagoreans. Perhaps you did not know that AMORC is but one of several self-styled Rosicrucian societies, though it is the most aggressive and the most extravagant in its self-advertisements. Maybe you would like to know how Rosicrucianism really started and what it amounts to.

Rosicrucianism arose out of alchemy in the seventh century. Alchemy was the pseudo-science of seeking the Philosopher's Stone to turn base metals to gold and to prolong life indefinitely. "Alchemy" and "chemistry" were originally one and the same word, and the discipline that the word symbolized was a mixture of science and magic. The words and the concepts they symbolized gradually drew apart in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries as science and magic split.

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Of the many men who claimed the name of "alchemist" in the Middle and Early Modern Ages, most were pioneer experimentalists. Although they mixed magic with science, they nevertheless founded modern chemistry. They wrote in a technical jargon which they made as obscure as they could to keep their trade secrets. They talked grandly of the wonderful chemical feats they hoped to accomplish. But never, so far as we can tell, did they ever really succeed in making the gold or the Elixir of Life.

Besides the alchemists who labored in the smoke of their laboratories and sometimes died of the fumes, others who claimed the name were simple swindlers. Still others were mystics who wrote moralistic treatises in alchemical language or used this language and symbolism to promote fraternal organizations. Of these last, the most celebrated were the Rosicrucians. They were famous in spite of the fact that there is a lot of doubt who they were, or even whether they existed.

Rosicrucianism first appeared in 1614 in Cassel, Germany. It took the form of an anonymous pamphlet called *Fama Fraternitatis, a Discovery of the Fraternity of the Most Laudable Order of the Rosy Cross.*

This manifesto, which defied the pope and denounced alchemy, described the career of a mysterious person called "C. R. C." This prodigy, said the pamphlet, was a Dutchman born in 1378. As a boy, C. R. C. had gone to the Orient. There he studied the wisdom of the ancients in Damascus and other Muslim centers. He visited the secret city of Damcar in Arabia, where he translated the Arabic *Book M.* This seems to be another unwritten classic like the *Book of Thoth* and H. P. Lovecraft's *Necronomicon.*

To hand on his ideas when he returned to Europe, C. R. C. founded a fraternity of eight members, whom he swore to celibacy and a century of secrecy. The author of the manifesto explained that the century was now up. Therefore the fraternity was asking for new members, who would form a great open conspiracy to reform Europe. The writer urged anybody who was interested to publish letters showing he was willing to join.

Next year there appeared a companion-piece to the first. This was *Confession of the R. C. Fraternity, to the Erudite of Europe:* an equally windy manifesto warning Europe that the Rosicrucians were about to make it over in the image of the wise Arabs of Damcar. Like its predecessor, this book is obvious Lutheran propaganda. All this happened, you will note, at the start of the Wars of Religion. The *Confession* denounces the pope as "Antichrist" and uses a rose-and-cross motif derived from Luther's seal. The seal of Martin Luther looked like this: an outline of a rose (including the stem and two leaves) on which is superimposed a small symbol consisting of a heart

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and a cross combined, the cross being above (that is, growing out of the top of) the heart.

The third book of the Rosicrucian canon, *The Chymical Marriage of Christian Rosenkreuz, Anno 1459*, first mentioned the mysterious Herr Rosenkreuz, the suppositive Dutchman, by name. This was the age when scholarly men bore two names, a vernacular name and a Latin name. In Latin, Christian Rosenkreuz would be Christianus Rosae Crucis, whence the initials C. R. C.

The *Chymical Marriage* belongs to a class of alchemistic-mystical writings which describe a dreamlike sequence of fantastic adventures in a world of alchemical symbols.

The story tells how a lovely female angel delivered to the narrator an invitation to a royal wedding. Delighted, he stuck four roses in his hat and set forth. After wondering which of four roads to take, he reached a "stately portal" and was admitted.

Passing through a series of gates, the narrator had adventures with a lion, a Virgin, and a troop of invisible barbers. At last he arrived at a disorderly banquet. This is plainly a satire on seventeenth-century Europe, with boasters and charlatans robbing simple-minded nobles. Another Virgin weighed everybody. Those who were not heavy enough were stripped, whipped, beheaded, or otherwise punished. The narrator witnessed the beheading and resurrection of six royal personages. Then he accidentally came upon a sleeping Venus, for which sin he too was punished.

Such narratives abound in alchemical treatises. Their imagery is often heavily sexual, as when, in Madathanas' *Golden Age Restored*, King Solomon has his harem stripped for the inspection of the narrator and gives him the girl of his choice. These puzzling compositions may be considered as Freudian wish-fulfilment dream-sequences, or as disguised alchemical recipes, or, by a Herculean effort, as both at once.

The Rosicrucian manifestoes aroused much excitement. Some men did publish letters as directed, but, so far as is known, none ever received a reply. Probably no such society existed.

Later on, similar publications appeared. These were obvious hoaxes. In 1623, for example, a wag posted in Paris a manifesto reading:

"We the deputies of the principal College of the Rose-cross have taken up our abode, visible and invisible, in this city by the grace of the Most High, towards whom are turned the hearts of the just. We show and teach without books and signs, and speak all sorts of languages in the countries where we dwell, to draw mankind, our fellows, from error and death."

Within a few weeks, anti-Rosicrucian books appeared purporting to show that these Rosicrucians were magicians of the deepest black. But

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still, nothing came of all the rumpus.

The likeliest author of the original Rosicrucian manifestoes is Johann Valentin Andreä, an earnest young Lutheran pastor of Stuttgart with a passion for reforming the world by secret societies. In his posthumously published autobiography, Andreä made the remarkable claim to having written the *Chymical Marriage* at the age of fifteen. Moreover his seal, like Luther's, used the rose-and-cross motif: an X with four roses in the angles.

It has been suggested that Andreä wrote the manifestoes either as a hoax or in the real hope of starting the society. In the latter case, it is supposed, he got cold feet when the replies began to come in. Others (like Waite and Spence, noted writers on the occult) object that a man of Andreä's "known intellectual nobility" would not have perpetrated a joke of such "wickedness and cruelty."

However, Andreä's intellectual nobility is a matter of opinion. Either he wrote at least part of the canon, or lied when he said he did. You have to judge his character from what he did; you can't tell what he did from what you think you know of his character. Anyway, many otherwise honest men see nothing very wicked in such a deceit, regarding persons who take such occult pronouncements seriously as fair game. And perhaps, as I have said, Andreä did hope at one time to do some good this way.

In any case, the manifestoes were evidently the work of one or more Lutherans, adherents of the doctrines of the physician and alchemist Paracelsus. He and they believed in elemental spirits, the doctrine of signatures (that God had given herbs the shapes needed to show men what sort of medicine they were good for), and pseudo-alchemistic mysticism.

They were plainly men of the early seventeenth century and not ancient Egyptians, Pythagoreans, or Atlanteans. Perhaps the Rosicrucians were connected with the *Militia Crucifera Evangelica*, or Cross-Bearing Evangelical Soldiery, a sort of Lutheran storm troop established some years before in Nürnberg by the alchemist Simon Studion. But the exact truth, like much else in occult history, is probably gone beyond recall.

Among those taken in by the original Rosicrucian literature, the German alchemist Michael Maier (1568–1622) wrote in defense of Rosicrucians without ever having known them in the flesh. His example was followed by the English mystic Thomas Vaughan. This Vaughan, twin brother of Henry Vaughan the poet, perished by inhaling mercury-vapor during an alchemical experiment in 1666. Another defender of the Rosicrucians was the astrologer John Heydon, a picturesque character who kept a familiar spirit named Taphzabnezeltharthaseraphimarab. Heydon wrote of visiting a

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magnificent underground Rosicrucian castle in the west of England, with jeweled tableware, and of voyaging to a gilded Rosicrucian utopia on an island in the Arabian Sea.

Later on, many novelists used the Rosicrucian theme in their stories. Percy Bysshe Shelley did one (under the pseudonym of "A Gentleman of the University of Oxford") called *St. Irvine; or, the Rosicrucian* (1811). Another was *An Adventure among the Rosicrucians* (1887) by Dr. Franz Hartmann, writing as "A Student of Occultism." Hartmann was a physician from Colorado who went to India to become a chela of Madame Blavatsky, founder of Theosophy.

The best-known Rosicrucian novel, which however does not use the word "Rosicrucian," is Lord Bulwer-Lytton's *Zanoni* (1853). This tells about an English artist, Glyndon, who is visiting in Italy in the late eighteenth century. He is befriended by Zanoni, one of the last two members of an ancient magical brotherhood obviously modeled on the Rosicrucians though not named. Glyndon stays at the castle of Zanoni's colleague Mejnour. With the foolhardiness of heroes in stories of the "idiot-plot" type, Glyndon evokes a veiled female spook. This specter, the Dweller on the Threshold (not to be confused with Lovecraft's Lurker on the Threshold), haunts him ever after. There is a tangle of love-affairs, resolved by getting the characters caught in the French Revolution and cutting off the heads of all but Glyndon, though it is hard to see why the author saved him except that he is English.

Such publicity has kept the Rosicrucians vaguely in the public mind during the last three centuries, long after Andreä and Studion have been forgotten. There have been many "Rosicrucian" societies from that day to this, each claiming identity with the probably mythical Rosicrucians of Andreä's time while calling all other claimants impostors.

During the eighteenth century, certain men tried to organize Masons of high degree into "Rosicrucian" inner-circle groups. All these dwindled away to nothing, but Scottish Rite Masonry still has a "Rosicrucian" advanced degree, introduced in the nineteenth century, as a vestigial trace of these efforts.

In 1781 the Prussian king, Friedrich Wilhelm II, joined a Rosicrucian society. Upon his accession, he appointed the leaders of the society, Wöllner and Bischoffswerder, as his ministers. These men promptly brought Prussia under a sort of Lutheran Inquisition as oppressive and anti-intellectual as the Inquisition of Spain.

In mid-nineteenth century, some English Masons formed a *Societas Rosicruciana in Anglia* with Dr. W. Wynn Westcott, a prominent English occultist, as Supreme Magus. The objectives of the S. R. I. A. were said to be "literary and antiquarian," but, though the organization had branches in Canada and the

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United States, it accomplished little beyond serving annual dinners and collecting five shillings a year from the members. At the same time, several clubs claiming Rosicrucian connections appeared in France.

The exact history of all these little cliques is hard to discover and hardly, in fact, worth discovering. They continually spring up with claims to immense antiquity and transcendental wisdom, split like amebas, and die out, leaving a fossil deposit of books and pamphlets in libraries. They generally claim that their alchemy is moral and metaphysical, though they hint that high-degree members sometimes make a little gold just to keep their hands in. They quarrel viciously, each claiming that while it is "secret," its rivals are "clandestine." The dictionary gives "clandestine" as a synonym for "secret," but in fraternal circles "clandestine" is a dirty word.

In twentieth-century America, Rosicrucianism has been mainly represented by the societies of Heindel, Clymer, Plummer, and Lewis.

In 1909, G. (for George) Winslow Plummer started a Society of Rosicrucians in New York City. This has continued to publish insipid inspirational literature since its founder's death in 1944.

Max Heindel, after studying occultism under the schismatic Austrian Theosophist Rudolf Steiner, had his destiny revealed to him in a trance. In this vision, his Mahatma ordered him to emigrate to Oceanside, California, and set up a Rosicrucian Fellowship. He ran this club from 1911 to his death in 1919, and at last accounts the organization was still in being.

Since 1905, R. (for Reuben) Swinburne Clymer has run a Rosicrucian Fraternity in Quakertown, Pennsylvania, which appears to be concerned mainly with book-publishing. Clymer (the Supreme Grand Master of the Supreme Grand Lodge and the Hierarch of Eulis) claims that his organization comes down from the fictitious lost continent of Atlantis via the nineteenth-century American occultists Lippard, Randolph, Dowd, and Brown, and preserves the Atlantean fire-worship whence all modern creeds are sprung. Clymer's forerunner, the New Thoughtist P. (for Paschal) Beverly Randolph (1825–75), had trouble with the police for publishing books on sex-hygiene at a time when such books were considered obscene.

H. (for Harve) Spencer Lewis was an egg-shaped man with a goatee and a saintly indifference to dirt under his fingernails. He worked as a magazine-illustrator until he got the Rosicrucian urge in 1915. He collected some acquaintances in New York City and issued a "pronunziamento" setting up the Ancient and Mystical Order Rosae Crucis in the United States of America, now known as AMORC.

The "Pronunziamento" left no

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doubt as to who was to be boss: ". . . the Order in America shall adopt strictly autocratic principles of government." Constitution, officers, Grand Council, and the rest were mere foofaraw, and ex-members have complained of anonymous threats in case they revealed secrets of the Order.

True, Lewis wrote elsewhere that: "The organization has no national or international founders, leaders, or discoverers, to whom personal allegiance must be pledged at any time or in any manner. All officers of the organization are elected. . . ." But such inconsistency is highly characteristic of Rosicrucian doctrines, as it is indeed of all such eclectic schools. Lewis ridiculed the teachings of Theosophy and then propounded doctrines much like them. In one place he assures his readers that they need not fear attack from a distance by magic because "the Cosmic space will not transmit such destructive thoughts," while in another place in the same book he warns that "Millions each year are mentally poisoned . . ." and so on.*

After a checkered career, Lewis and his AMORC found a lasting home in San Jose, California, where he built an imitation Egyptian temple as headquarters. Since his death in 1939, his son has continued the business, mainly the giving of correspondence courses in occultism, at the old stand.

These lessons, while they promise to teach you to project your astral body whither you will and accomplish other marvels, are merely a hash of Neoplatonism, Kabbalism, Theosophy, Baconianism, and similar forms of the Higher Foolishness. Lewis asserted that his order was founded by Pharaoh Ahmose I (sixteenth century B.C.; also spelled Aahmes, Amasis, etc.) † and claimed the Essenes (a puritanical Jewish sect of the time of Christ) as fellow-members.

He also borrowed Theosophy's Great White Brotherhood and its Master Koot Hoomi (or Kut-Hu-Mi as Lewis spells it) but rejected its multiple souls and vegetarianism. Besides its courses, AMORC publishes books on pyramidology, Lemuria, and similar pseudo-scientific foibles.

When, in the 1920's, the publishers of the Encyclopaedia Britannica compiled their Fourteenth Edition, they thought to popularize the work by getting people with big names to write articles on the fields in which they had become famous: James Joseph Tunney on pugilism, Henry Ford on mass-production, and so on.

*H. Spencer Lewis: *Rosicrucian Questions and Answers* (1929–41), p. 211, and *Rosicrucian Manual* (1918–38), pp. 157, 200.

† *More recent official AMORC doctrine, as disclosed to the press by lodge master Albert Fink, specifies that the order was founded by Amenhotep IV in 1350* B.C. (*Oakland, Calif.*, Tribune, *Sept. 16, 1955*). — A.B.

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The result may have been a livelier encyclopaedia, but it was certainly one with a lower standard of scholarship than the preceding editions. Lewis had the singular good luck to be asked to write the article *Rosicrucianism*, thus enshrining his own somewhat fictional version of the history of the movement in a niche where few would have the nerve to criticize it. Naturally, he worked in an adroit plug for his own organization, so that to this day you can read there that AMORC purveys the only genuine occult snake-oil; accept no substitutes and beware of imitations.

Lewis' enemy Clymer accused him of having taken his ideas from the notorious British magus Aleister Crowley (1875–1947): occultist, poet, explorer, mountaineer, big-game hunter, and also professional screwball and bogey-man. This may or may not be true. During their long feud, Lewis challenged Clymer to a public debate as to which was the bigger faker. Clymer counter-challenged Lewis to an investigation of their respective organizations by a committee of Masons.

As far as an outsider can judge, neither really wanted anything of the sort. Both retreated, throwing up a barrage of objections and qualifications like a cloud of ink from a fugitive squid.

The Rosicrucians display certain features that are common to the whole occult fraternity, whether in primitive or in civilized society. Such clubs pretend to vast age, though their life-histories in actual fact are short and full of change and trouble. Their politics seethe with schisms and skulduggery. They quarrel furiously over claims of priority and authenticity. (As a small example, the Ngbe of Nigeria, a priestly-phallic society, claims to be the "original Egbo," though it is actually an offshoot, not a parent, of the great Egbo Society.)

The fraternal occultists seize upon fragments of ancient lore to lend a spurious glamor of antiquity to their own synthetic doctrines and rituals. For example, the Knights of Pythias, which was founded in 1864 by a U. S. government clerk named Rathbone and once numbered three-quarters of a million, claimed inspiration from the Pythagorean Brotherhood, a philosophical sect which in ancient times flourished among the Greeks of Southern Italy.

The still larger Odd Fellows asserted affinity with the Essenes and similar ancient orders, real and imaginary.

The Perfektibilisten (founded 1776) of the German law-professor Adam Weishaupt were supposed to be connected with the Rosicrucians and with the Spanish Christian mystics called "Illuminati." However, Weishaupt's real objective was not magic, but revolutionary republican politics. His occult hints were a mere veneer to conceal his true aims.

Their doctrines are a mishmash of

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borrowings from a variety of older sources, regardless of whether the older doctrines make sense or even whether they are consistent with one another. Any idea that has ever captivated any considerable group of people is likely to turn up in the canon of any occult school, regardless of how thoroughly it has been exploded. Occult doctrines are compiled on the principle that, to many people, the fact that they cannot understand something proves that it must be old, wise, and profound. So, the more obscure and incomprehensible the better.

But to paraphrase Dr. Durant, charlatanism is an institution with a venerable past and a promising future. As long as people continue to want something for nothing — money without work, knowledge without study, virtue without self-discipline — so long will organizations of the Rosicrucian type continue to flourish.

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F&SF, as a better magazine of science fiction, prides itself on presenting the earlier stories of the more interesting newer writers. Helen Urban, hitherto as little known to American readers, here extrapolates a more exasperating verbal trend.

The Finer Breed

by HELEN M. URBAN

CAPTAIN PORTER GRUMBLED AND spun the selector. There was Psyche-Drama ("Passion Unleashed"), Psyche-Advice ("The Soul and the Unexpressed Comparative"), Space-Recruit ("Glamor on the Startrails"), Sin-Confession ("Seduced by a Sadist"), the ever-present Center Station reenactment, and Northwest's usual sustainer — music.

He swept through the channels once again, then returned to Center Station's commercial. He had to admit it was a better effort. Northwest Station needed a finer slogan. Something to more fully catch the interest of Northwest's clients.

The announcer's voice had the unctuous hush of the more reverent: "Remember, the next time you go out for a night of less restrained debauchery — feel the need of confinement — call your nearer Center Station officer for a more neat, more precise arrest."

The announcer's voice became more important: "And now, folks, our hourly special! Flash! Doctor Emering Sitskin, more absolutely and with little fear of fail, will certify for most everything from a lapse of good taste to a fuller operating self-expression episode. Think of it, folks! Doctor Emering Sitskin! At Center Station!"

The scene faded to the Center Station control room. The chronographer counted down the time to Doctor Sitskin's sample certification of a Passive Anal-Fixed Degenerate (Sniffer type).

"— five — four — three — two one — zero! You're on, Doctor Sitskin!"

Captain Porter growled and turned off the TV.

Lieutenant Jimmy growled in a better imitation of his captain as he said, "Why can't we have that sort of finer public relations material, Captain?"

"Taxes!" the captain exploded. "If we had the men to collect the taxes to pay more men, we'd have

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the money to hire more men to collect the taxes to support a better public relations officer."

Lieutenant Jimmy looked at his captain with more awe and more admiration. "Captain Porter. Sir. Was that — ?"

Captain Porter smiled slightly deprecatingly and admitted it rather gruffly.

Lieutenant Jimmy felt better. He had spotted a Third Level Logic Statement! He began to whistle a gayer, catchier tune as softly until Porter snapped a sharper reproof.

"That's Center's sing-off."

Jimmy flushed as quickly, quoting Center's slogan more bitterly: "*Center Station, the Better Station.* Better than *what?*"

Captain Porter gasped at the obscenity.

Jimmy blanched and streamed: "Jimmy is as profoundly ashamed! An anti-adult, sub-social expression! Jimmy knows the more normal repress all more along the line. Or become clients!"

He ended his stream with as engaging a smile.

Captain Porter patted his hand. "More beautifully put, my boy. The better officer represses. That's a prime. Watch your streaming and, well — who knows?" He as jauntily recited, "T.L.L.T. means Third Level Logic Training! The Better Training for More Discriminating People!" He patted Jimmy's hand again. "T.L.L.T. could be for you, Jimmy."

The clients' bell sounded, cutting into Jimmy's more enthusiastic heartfelter, more rapturous expressions of thanks.

Porter answered the alarm: "Northwest Station responding more readily!"

"Come and get me," a fainter voice pleaded.

"Name, please!" Porter reprimanded as severely.

The faint voice firmed up at the reproof: "White; blue eyes; brown hair; five feet nine; type 1A; male; file clerk at the More Triumphant Mercantile Association Incorporated and Better Integrated; paid up at Northwest Station for the current quarter; residence permit No. 790,-038,659,234; Wolfgang Jones."

Porter smiled as pleasurable a smile at the neater precision, and requested as kindly, "Type of illness?"

Jones replied as pridefully: "Self-expression episode."

Porter drew in his breath more sharply and motioned to Jimmy to check Jones's tax status, then snapped more quickly, "Service?"

"A fuller scale pickup, of course," Jones announced as awesomely.

"Stay by the call box; we'll send a squad out sooner."

Porter was all more businesslike. He punched the fuller scale pickup alarm and the roof siren cut looser, bringing flocks of people into the street for the turnout.

He switched the microphone to make-up: "Send down five men,

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made up for a rather full scale operation. A self-expression case!" he announced more importantly.

He rang the garage: "Bring the larger ambulance to the squad room door."

His voice quivered as he alerted their doctor: "A self-expression case, Doctor Tremblay!"

Doctor Tremblay replied as brightly, "We'll have him as well certified, ready for psyche-processing, in shorter order, Captain."

"Better lad," Porter stated, as enthused.

The television truck pulled out with siren screaming; the production crew, its scenery truck as behind; falling into line; the officers, fresh from make-up, in their neater, whiter smocks, rubberer gloves and more sterile masks, leaped into the larger ambulance and drew into the procession, the riot gun carrier right behinder.

Captain Porter tuned to Northwest's TV channel and sat down to sweat it out. Would Jones fail the station?

With the more muted rumble of timpani, with Northwest's as glittering fanfare, the more vivid reenactment of Jones's episode montaged on the screen. From four fuller dimensional sound speakers came Jones's stream of self-statement sub-plus-upper consciousness exteriorizations of his loneliness syndrome.

His rejection! His wife! That poorer breakfast!

Jones buried his head in his hands; more tortured, further driven.

Jones fought self-expression, and Porter tensed as ecstatic; it was a finer, lighter, more satisfying wash. He *felt* Jones's despair-cadenced footsteps; his tom-tom heartbeats; the child's throat in Jones's hands! Whirling across the screen in tenser ghastliness . . . : child on child . . . his childhood on this childhood, melting into one. This child is Jones and Jones kills himself, casting the limp form at the mother's feet. The child's mother screams — Jones's mother! His symbol! Jones's victory! Porter's victory! He was as identified.

Northwest's fanfare; more radiantly triumphant for Jones's slower more dramatic walk to the call box.

Porter felt drained, as completely washed — would Jones repeat his error? The fury of his suspense as tightly dominated Porter as the picture closed in on Jones's face.

"White; blue eyes; brown hair; five feet nine . . ." Jones droned with his face as wooden.

Captain Porter sighed deeper and wiped away the sweat of his more terrified apprehension. Wolfgang Jones had come througher!

"Sounder client," he breathed, then bent to prepare Jones's bill.

Porter was as rededicated to his finer goal: the better public servant, running the finer tax-supported institution for the greater city and the grander planet in the more splendid solar system.

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"A better station for our clients, through service," he mused experimentally, then reached for a pencil. He had it! The finer slogan!

"Better Station, For Better Clients, Through Service!"

He tipped his chin higher. "More apt," he stated. "And *much* more apt than Center's —"

Then he stopped, aghast.

He dropped his hands to his sides and stood up. His face was drained of life. From one moment to the next, from a sane man whose comparatives were decently uncompleted to an uncontrolled degenerate who *thanned* and *superlatived*. He ran his hands through his hair in desperation, full desperation, complete desperation, the clutch of episode upon him, the madness of uncontrolled behavior descending over his mind.

With one latter gasp of sane agony, with as ultimate a shred of his contact with reality he stumbled to his control panel and rang for Doctor Tremblay and commitment. At Northwest's finer moment, he, its finer captain, had failed when the chips were further down.

A panorama of possibilities swept across his mind — the terror stream of humanity throughout the galaxy if everyone should suddenly give way to superlatives and completed comparisons — then he slipped into full psychosis and shook his fist in the direction of Center Station.

"Northwest Station, the best police station in the whole galaxy, barring none!"

Then he sank to the floor in a babbling retreat to wait for Doctor Tremblay and his most refined, his *finest* officers.

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Recommended Reading

The best science-fantasy books of 1955

by ANTHONY BOUCHER

TEN MONTHS AGO I BURST OUT IN something of a jeremiad in this department, asking loudly "All right; *what* science fiction boom?" and from the available data concluding, among other things, that "after more than five years of experiment and promotion, science fiction is not a significant part of book-publishing."

Now, as I write this shortly before Christmas, the final returns on 1955 are in — and Had I But Known what dire doom lurked ahead of us, I might have been more embittered.

For 1955 was, unquestionably, the year in which the bubble burst. In regular hardcover trade publishing, the number of science fiction titles declined to 30 — a slump of 37% from the previous year and of 44% from the peak year 1953 . . . and even a falling off of 14% from 1949, the experimental year which supposedly launched the "boom." And sales of individual titles declined correspondingly, to the point where a firstrate book by a well-known author, published by a major firm, could receive rave reviews and incredibly sell under 2,000 copies.

The picture was somewhat brighter in paperback originals and in simultaneous hard-and-paper publication, but not enough so to halt the downward trend of s.f. books as a whole. The total number of new s.f. titles, in all forms, dropped 21% from 74 to 59 — and how minute, comparatively, that number 59 is, you may gather from the fact that mysteries in 1955, a slightly below-average year, ran to around 300 titles, 200 in hard covers plus another 100 in paper originals.

There are 24 publishing houses, at present, which bring out regular lists of mystery and suspense novels, 18 in hardcovers and 6 in paper. At the end of 1955, there were exactly 3 houses (one hard, one paper, one simultaneous) steadily in the market for science fiction.

As to the quality, rather than quantity, of 1955's s.f. books — well, here one can be a good deal more cheerful. It didn't reach the heights of 1953, a peak year in all respects; but it compared favorably with any other period, and continued to indicate that science fiction can, both in its ideas and in its

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literary values, make an important contribution to our modern culture — if only that culture will wake up to s.f.'s existence as something apart from comic books and monster films.

Perhaps the smaller number of s.f. titles may, in another year, mean sharply increased average quality, reader-recognition of the good uncluttered by the dull and opportunistic, and eventually substantial sales per title. This is, at any rate, the hope that writers, editors and publishers are clinging to — and it should stand a good chance of fulfilment if the future continues to produce books as admirable as these best specimens of 1955.

S.F. NOVELS

One hopeful sign of creativity in 1955 was the increase in the number of original novels, and particularly first novels by authors previously associated with shorter fiction. The full-length debuts of H. Chandler Elliott, Jack Finney and especially Damon Knight were not wholly successful but gave marked promise for the future; and Philip K. Dick achieved, in his first long story, an almost Heinleinesque blend of action melodrama and logical creation of a civilization. Leigh Brackett deserted space-romance for her first serious imaginative novel, and proved that she could rival veterans Clarke and Wyndham. C. M. Kornbluth sustained his high average with the first good treatment to date of the Russian-occupied-America theme; and Fredric Brown turned out the year's only genuinely funny s.f. novel . . . with the exception of Wibberley's delightful satire, so wholly charming that I'll listen to no nonsensical argument about whether it can be strictly classified as s.f.

THE LONG TOMORROW, by Leigh Brackett (Doubleday, $2.95*)
MARTIANS, GO HOME, by Fredric Brown (Dutton, $2.75*)
EARTHLIGHT, by Arthur C. Clarke (Ballantine, $2.75*; paper, 35c)
SOLAR LOTTERY, by Philip K. Dick (Ace, 35c)
NOT THIS AUGUST, by C. M. Kornbluth (Doubleday, $2.95*)
THE MOUSE THAT ROARED, by Leonard Wibberley (Little, Brown, $3.50*)
RE-BIRTH, by John Wyndham (Ballantine, $2*; paper, 35c)

S.F. SHORT STORIES

Collections by Theodore Sturgeon and by Henry Kuttner and C. L. Moore were (as is hardly surprising) of the highest quality, but contained too high a proportion of stories familiar from earlier reprintings to rank among the best new books. Both Asimov and Oliver more wisely selected only the unfamiliar; and Oliver chose his stories so carefully and added such excellent new material never published in magazines that his collection is, to my taste, not only the best group of short stories but the outstanding science fiction book of the year. Priestley's round-up of his shorter

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pieces on the nature of Time (one of which you'll find in this issue of F&SF) and Lord Russell's witty and penetrating nightmares are welcome contributions from authors not specializing in our field.

THE MARTIAN WAY, by Isaac Asimov (Doubleday, $2.95*)

ANOTHER KIND, by Chad Oliver (Ballantine, $2*; paper, 35c)

THE OTHER PLACE, by J. B. Priestley (Harper, $3*)

NIGHTMARES OF EMINENT PERSONS, by Bertrand Russell (Simon & Schuster, $3.50*)

S.F. ANTHOLOGIES

The department hardest hit by the slump in s.f. was the anthology, which blasted down from 1954's fantastic high of 25 titles to a mere 10, with hardcover anthologization at its (not unwelcome) nadir since 1949. Quality slipped as well as quantity, with even such reliable veterans as Groff Conklin and Frederik Pohl letting their standards down somewhat; but the infallible Miss Merril continued on her tasteful way, and Donald Wollheim did his most mature and creative editing since his pioneering POCKET BOOK OF S.-F. (1943).

GALAXY OF GHOULS, edited by Judith Merril (Lion, 35c)

TERROR IN THE MODERN VEIN, edited by Donald A. Wollheim (Hanover, $3.95*)

S.F. CRITIQUE

I am still hopeful that someone will produce the definitive history of science fiction, comparable to Howard Haycraft's books on the detective story. Meanwhile Basil Davenport's brief volume is the perfect introduction to the field; try it on any friends who wonder why an intelligent, literate, cultivated person (like you) considers science fiction important.

INQUIRY INTO SCIENCE FICTION, by Basil Davenport (Longmans, Green, $2.50*)

S.F. UNCLASSIFIABLE

This one is not a novel, nor an essay, nor a humor-book, nor even quite a conventional satire. It is simply a precise study of the historical consequences when *H. sapiens* begins to be born tailed — a model of logical extrapolation and deadpan acuity.

THE AGE OF THE TAIL, by H. Allen Smith (Little, Brown, $3*)

FANTASY

In a year of very little "pure" fantasy, Manning Coles plays captivatingly absurd games with ghosts and crime; Bradbury revises his first (1947) collection of stories into a volume debatable if you know the original, essential if you don't; and Tolkien continues with the second volume of his magnificent epic myth of hobbits and the Middle World. (And *where* is the third and final volume, which was announced for publication in the fall of 1955?)

THE OCTOBER COUNTRY, by Ray

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Bradbury (Ballantine, $3.50*)
HAPPY RETURNS, by Manning Coles (Doubleday, $3*)
THE TWO TOWERS, by J. R. R. Tolkien (Houghton Mifflin, $5*)

FOLKLORE

Every reader of imaginative fiction will find stimulus in the analyses of possible truth behind legend by Professor Daniel and other BBC lecturers, and incomparably lively entertainment in Professor Randolph's assemblage of Ozark folk tales.
MYTH OR LEGEND?, by G. E. Daniel and others (Macmillan, $2.50*)
THE DEVIL'S PRETTY DAUGHTER, collected by Vance Randolph (Columbia University, $3.75*)

NON-FICTION

The popularizers of space are still with us, particularly on the teen-age level; but few of their products can interest the science fiction reader, who is well ahead of them already. The most indoctrinated enthusiast, however, should welcome the clear concise text of Clarke and the accurate visualizations of Smith; and Rosen's account is an invaluable first-hand document of the beginnings of spaceflight. I have long since run out of superlatives for Mr. Ley, who annually produces the year's best book of imaginative non-fiction.
SALAMANDERS AND OTHER WONDERS, by Willy Ley (Viking, $3.95*)
THE VIKING ROCKET STORY, by Milton W. Rosen (Harper, $3.75*)
THE EXPLORATION OF THE MOON, illustrations by R. A. Smith, text by Arthur C. Clarke (Harper, $2.50*)

FOR POSTGRADUATES ONLY

Far from popularized, these accounts of our neighbors in space are definitive reference books rather than light reading for the curious. To the student (and the science fiction writer), their length and comprehensiveness should justify their high cost.
PHYSICS OF THE PLANET MARS, by Gérard de Vaucouleurs (Macmillan, $10*)
THE MOON: A COMPLETE DESCRIPTION, by Dr. H. Percy Wilkins and Patrick Moore (Macmillan, $12*)

HUMOR

Fantasy continues to flourish splendidly in cartoon form, particularly among the modern French artists and the American college students (as edited by Boltinoff) who seem influenced by them. Single-author collections offer nothing quite comparable to those by Addams and Searle in 1954; but George Price's un-jelled world is disquieting enough. Pogo and MAD need, I trust, no recommendation to readers of F&SF; the 1955 volumes (especially Kelly's first) are, if possible, better than ever.
THE HOWLS OF IVY, edited by Henry Boltinoff (Bantam, 25c)
MORE FRENCH CARTOONS, edited by William Cole and Douglas McKee (Dell, 25c)

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THE POGO PEEK-A-BOOK and POTLUCK POGO, by Walt Kelly (Simon & Schuster, $1* each)

MAD STRIKES BACK! (Ballantine, 35c)

GEORGE PRICE'S CHARACTERS (Simon & Schuster, $2.95*)

JUVENILES

Science fiction for teen-agers was plentiful in 1955; but of the very few specimens which were both literate and accurate, most were aimed at the novice who has never before encountered s.f. Norton's adventure yarn was best suited to please the regular reader of s.f., young or old. Todd and Sutton produced the only at all satisfactory stories for younger children — and delightful they both are. For the very youngest, Bradbury collaborated with an excellent pictorial artist to shape one of the most excitingly creative of all his books. Two volumes of juvenile non-fiction deserve adult attention for the simple clarity of their texts and the disciplined imagination and beauty of their pictures.

SWITCH ON THE NIGHT, by Ray Bradbury, illustrations by Madeleine Gekiere (Pantheon, $2.50*)

STAR GUARD, by Andre Norton (Harcourt, Brace, $3*)

VENUS BOY, by Lee Sutton (Lothrop, Lee & Shepard, $2.50*)

SPACE CAT VISITS VENUS, by Ruthven Todd (Scribner's, $2*)

EXPLORING THE MOON, by Roy A. Gallant, illustrated by Lowell Hess (Garden City, $2*)

THE GOLDEN BOOK OF ASTRONOMY, by Rose Wyler and Gerald Ames, illustrated by John Polgreen (Simon & Schuster, $3.95*)

* Books marked with an asterisk may be ordered from F&SF's Readers' Book Service. For details see page 128.

FLASH!

F&SF is proud to announce that Alfred Bester's first science fiction novel since THE DEMOLISHED MAN four years ago will appear serially in these pages soon. Look for —

THE BURNING SPEAR

A New Novel By

ALFRED BESTER

beginning in the June issue of F&SF

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In one of the briefest of his tales, Ray Bradbury tells of a hopeless and gallant vigil on a dim moor where there is no Time . . . only Forever.

The Dragon

by RAY BRADBURY

THE NIGHT BLEW IN THE SHORT grass on the moor; there was no other motion. It had been years since a single bird had flown by in the great blind shell of sky. Long ago a few small stones had simulated life when they crumbled and fell into dust. Now only the night moved in the souls of the two men bent by their lonely fire in the wilderness; darkness pumped quietly in their veins and ticked silently in their temples and their wrists.

Firelight fled up and down their wild faces and welled in their eyes in orange tatters. They listened to each other's faint, cool breathing and the lizard blink of their eyelids. At last, one man poked the fire.

"Don't, idiot; you'll give us away!"

"No matter," said the second man. "The dragon can smell us miles off, anyway. God's breath, it's cold. I wish I was back at the castle."

"It's death, not sleep, we're after. . . ."

"Why? Why? The dragon never sets foot inside the town walls!"

"Quiet, fool! He eats men traveling alone from our town to the next!"

"Let them be eaten and let us get home!"

"Wait now; listen!"

The two men froze.

They waited a long time, but there was only the shake of their horses' nervous skin like black velvet tambourines jingling the silver stirrup buckles, softly, softly.

"Ah." The second man sighed. "What a land of nightmares. Everything happens here. Someone blows out the sun; it's night. And then, and *then*, oh, God, listen! This dragon, they say his eyes are fire, his breath a white gas; you can see him burn across the dark lands. He runs with sulfur and thunder and kindles the grass. Sheep panic and die insane. Women deliver forth monsters. The dragon's fury is such that tower walls shake back to dust. His victims, at sunrise, are strewn hither-thither on the hills. How many knights, I ask, have gone for this monster and failed, even as we are doomed to fail?"

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"Enough of that!"

"More than enough! Out here in this desolation I cannot tell what *year* this is!"

"Nine hundred years since the Nativity."

"No, no," whispered the second man, eyes shut. "On this moor is no Time, is only Forever. I feel if I ran back on the road the town would be gone, the people yet unborn, things changed, the castles unquarried from the rocks, the timbers still uncut from the forests; don't ask how I know, the moor knows and tells me. And here we sit alone in the land of the fire dragon, God save us!"

"Be you afraid, then gird on your armor!"

"What use? The dragon runs from nowhere; we cannot guess its home. It vanishes in fog; we know not where it goes. Aye, on with our armor; we'll die well-dressed."

Half into his silver corselet, the second man stopped again and turned his head.

Across the dim country, full of night and nothingness from the heart of the moor itself, the wind sprang full of dust from clocks that used dust for telling time. There were black suns burning in the heart of this new wind and a million burnt leaves shaken from some autumn tree beyond the horizon. This wind melted landscapes, lengthened bones like white wax, made the blood roil and thicken to a muddy deposit in the brain. The wind was a thousand souls dying and all time confused and in transit. It was a fog inside of a mist inside of a darkness, and this place was no man's place and there was no year or hour at all, but only these men in a faceless emptiness of sudden frost, storm and white thunder which moved behind the great falling pane of green glass that was the lightning. A squall of rain drenched the turf, all faded away until there was unbreathing hush and the two men waiting alone with their warmth in a cool season.

"There," whispered the first man. "Oh, *there* . . ."

Miles off, rushing with a great chant and a roar — the dragon.

In silence, the men buckled on their armor and mounted their horses. The midnight wilderness was split by a monstrous gushing as the dragon roared nearer, nearer; its flashing yellow glare spurted above a hill and then, fold on fold of dark body, distantly seen, therefore indistinct, flowed over that hill and plunged vanishing into a valley.

"Quick!"

They spurred their horses forward to a small hollow.

"This is where it passes!"

They seized their lances with mailed fists, and blinded their horses by flipping the visors down over their eyes.

"Lord!"

"Yes, let us use His name."

On the instant, the dragon rounded a hill. Its monstrous amber eye fed on them, fired their armor in red

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glints and glitters. With a terrible wailing cry it flung itself forward.

"Mercy, God!"

The lance struck under the unlidded yellow eye, buckled, tossed the man through the air. The dragon hit, spilled him over, down, ground him under. Passing, the black brunt of its shoulder smashed the remaining horse and rider a hundred feet against the side of a boulder, wailing, wailing, the dragon shrieking, the fire all about, around, under it, a pink, yellow, orange sun-fire with great soft plumes of blinding smoke.

"Did you *see* it?" cried a voice. "Just like I told you!"

"The same! The same! A knight in armor! We *hit* him!"

"You goin' to stop?"

"Did once; found nothing. Don't like to stop on this moor. I get the willies. Got a *feel*, it has."

"But we hit *something!*"

"Gave him plenty of whistle; chap wouldn't budge!"

A steaming blast cut the mist aside.

"We'll make Stokely on time. More coal, eh, Fred?"

Another whistle shook dew from the empty sky. The night train, in fire and fury, shot through a gully, up a rise, and vanished away over cold earth, toward the north, leaving black smoke and steam to dissolve in the numbed air minutes after it had passed and gone forever.

Flying Chaucer

A man ther was of Outer Spays allso;
Withouten eny hors he did i-goe,
But as a swalwè soard ful merilie
On hi aboven al the companye
Withyn a straunge devys of metail mayd:
A bol for fysshes coverd al his heyde.
His clok as blakkè was as lycorys;
His hayr upon his schuldres fel, Iwis.
As sodain as a faucon his devys
I-droppen wold on erth and thennè ryse
Anon so spedilie in too the skye,
A huntre cold nat folwè with hys eyghe.
This was y-wrought by jet-propulcioun:
Lo, wich a gret thyng is invencioun!

— ANTHONY BRODE

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